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ABSTRACT

This handbook is designed to help school communities work together to strengthen California's public schools. It provides information to help leaders in school-improvement efforts be more effective and is designed for parent leaders, teacher leaders, school administrators, businesspeople, philanthropists, school board members, and others with a stake in the schools. Section A opens with an overview of changes in California education and what public schools must do to keep up with these changes. Sections B-G outline six key education-improvement issues: (1) curriculum--what subjects schools should teach and how these subjects fit together; (2) student performance--how well students are learning and how this learning can be measured; (3) teaching and instruction--the different ways that students, classes, and time can be organized to affect learning and the challenges facing educators; (4) school funding--how much schools must spend and how they can spend it; (5) the system itself--who is responsible for what duties in California schools, including ways in which schools are held accountable for their performance; and (6) a shared responsibility--how can schools and communities work better together. Each section includes a brief description of what's happening in California today; a brief discussion of key issues and trends shaping the future; suggestions for effective ways to get involved; and a list of resources and references. An appendix also lists agencies that can help. (RJM)

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ED 425 510

UNDERSTANDING CALIFORNIA'S SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT ISSUES

A Handbook

EdSource School Involvement Project

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UNDERSTANDING CALIFORNIA'S SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT ISSUES

A Handbook

EdSource School Involvement Project

"How can we begin to talk about public schools so that we simultaneously capture their failures and articulate their potential? The kind of talk that comes from thoughtful work and leads to thoughtful action. ... For public education is ongoing, unfinished, as the democratic state is ongoing, continually trying to realize its promise."

Mike Rose
from *Possible Lives*, 1995

"What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all its children."

John Dewey, 1899

ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK

This Handbook is part of the EdSource School Involvement Project, which is designed to help school communities get the facts and work together constructively to strengthen California public schools. The publications in this project reflect our commitment to presenting diverse points of view on sometimes difficult issues. They also encourage school employees, policymakers, parents, and other community members to work together to address the many challenges Californians face as we attempt to educate the state's young people for the 21st century.

Who will this Handbook help?

This Handbook provides important information to help leaders in school improvement efforts be more effective. Those who will find it most useful include:

- **Parent leaders** and other community members who serve on school or district committees;
- **Teacher leaders** who serve on school site councils, districtwide committees, or statewide task forces, or are preparing to become school administrators;
- **Other school employees** who serve on school site councils, districtwide committees, or statewide task forces;
- **School administrators** who must lead schoolwide reform efforts and who provide background information to school site councils and employees;
- **Businesspeople** and **community members** who want to be more active and effective in school improvement efforts;
- **Philanthropists** in private and corporate foundations that focus on education improvement;
- **School board members**, both new and experienced, interested in working with their community on school improvement issues;
- **Elected officials** at the local, county, or state level who need to understand public education policy issues;
- **Higher education faculty** and **administrators** who teach K-12 credential or policy classes, prepare tomorrow's generation of K-12 teachers, or serve as liaisons between the higher education and K-12 systems;
- **Education writers** and others working in the media who want to strengthen their coverage of public school issues;
- **Leaders in school reform networks** who want to understand the political and policy environment of the schools they work with; and
- **National policymakers** who understand that the way California shapes the future of its public schools has implications for the rest of the nation.

Editorial assistance and design: KSA Group, Inc. and A-Plus Communications

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A Changing World

California is changing — can public schools keep up?

***Sections B-F** outline five key education improvement issues. Each section includes a description of what's happening in California today; a brief discussion of key issues and trends shaping the future; suggestions for effective ways to get involved; and a list of resources and references.*

Section B

Curriculum: What students need to know and be able to do

What subjects should schools teach and how do they fit together?

Section C

Student Performance: What we can and should expect

How well are students learning and how can we measure this? Plus: how does student behavior and school order affect achievement?

Section D

Teaching and Instruction: Making sure schools and educators can meet rising expectations

How do the ways students, classes, and time are organized affect learning? And what challenges do educators face?

Section E

School Funding: Equity, adequacy, efficiency, and control

How much do schools have to spend and how do they spend it?

Section F

The System: Roles, oversight, and accountability

Who is responsible for what in California schools? How are schools held accountable for their performance?

Section G

A Shared Responsibility: Schools and communities together

The community plays a vital role in schools' effectiveness. How can schools and communities work better together?

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A Changing World

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A CHANGING WORLD PLACES NEW DEMANDS ON SCHOOLS

THE WORLD AHEAD FOR TODAY'S STUDENTS

Technology = more information = more change

Some experts estimate that the amount of knowledge in the world doubles every five years. In a fast-changing, information-based economy, students need to know how to use technology to access, evaluate, and make use of up-to-date information.

The workplace is different

The U.S. economy increasingly depends on technology — whether it's used to generate and manage information or facilitate high-performance manufacturing. This and other changes in the workplace will require new, higher-level skills.

Career expectations are changing

Today's young people could change jobs 10 to 12 times in their lives, and may change careers entirely two to three times, including some careers we can't even imagine today. If those assumptions are true, average workers must be able to transfer their skills to new jobs, readily master new skills, assimilate in different work environments, and probably plan for their own retirements.

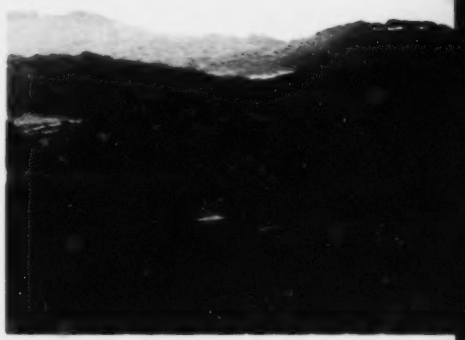
As Californians near the end of the 20th century, we find ourselves living in a world where change is the only constant, and the rate of change continues to accelerate. In less than a generation, sophisticated technological developments have fundamentally altered the world we live in.

That statement is hardly a revelation to most adults. We know it to be true from personal experience. It affects how we do our jobs, how our doctors treat our illnesses, how our auto mechanics repair our cars, and how our children spend their free time.

We also can sense the larger scope and magnitude of the changes by just paying attention to the daily news. We hear about new discoveries and inventions and an economic shift that is creating jobs that didn't exist just a few years ago. The speed with which information now comes to us — and the ways in which it arrives — makes obvious a communications revolution that is tearing down the barriers of time and distance.

And it's evident — in our workplaces and our neighborhoods — that Californians themselves are changing. We meet people from all over the world in our local supermarkets. We also see growing poverty in some areas and growing prosperity in others.

The social, economic, and political changes affecting our personal lives have an impact on our public schools as well. This is not just in obvious ways, such as the need to rewire classrooms for technology. Society's changes have profound direct and indirect implications for every major area of school operations: curriculum, student performance, teaching and instruction, school funding, governance, and school accountability. And many of these implications are only beginning to be understood.



Napa Valley

CHANGING STUDENTS IN A CHANGING SOCIETY

A more diverse student body

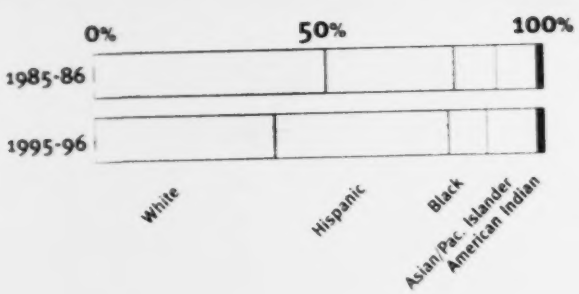
California's schools are educating a staggering 5.8 million students (in 1996-97), who are much different than their counterparts from the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. More than half the state's students identify themselves with an ethnic or racial group other than white.

The graduation roll call at many California high schools sounds like a meeting of the United Nations. In some school districts, 50 or more languages are spoken. Nearly a quarter of California's students come to school speaking something other than English as their primary language.

In our increasingly global society, California's students could be at a real advantage when they enter the work force because of this unprecedented exposure at school to people with different perspectives. But sometimes the racial and cultural diversity leads to the tensions, misunderstandings, and conflicts that can occur when people of different backgrounds come together. Perhaps the most extreme examples are the development of gangs along racial lines and disturbing reports of hate crimes among young people.

In addition to the social issues, the increased student diversity complicates instructional issues, such as the most effective way to provide education to students learning English. Diversity also can make the relationship between schools and families, in such areas as communication and discipline, more complex.

STUDENT ETHNICITY IN CALIFORNIA



Data: California Department of Education

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Experts Say

"SOME BELIEVE THAT FRACTURED FAMILIES AND DAILY EXPOSURE TO STRESSORS SUCH AS ENVIRONMENTAL DISASTERS, WAR, STARVATION, AIDS, POVERTY, ABUSE OF POWER, AND DRUG AND CRIME STORIES ON THE NIGHTLY NEWS HAVE FOSTERED ADOLESCENTS WHO ARE OLD BEFORE THEIR TIME.

"WHAT IS THE DANGER OF HURRYING CHILDREN TO BECOME ADULTS BEFORE THEY ARE EMOTIONALLY READY? MOST ADOLESCENT BEHAVIOR RESEARCHERS BELIEVE CHILDREN BECOME MORE SUSCEPTIBLE TO PREMATURE SEXUAL RELATIONS, DRUGS, ALCOHOL, AND NEGATIVE PEER INFLUENCE."

JULIA STRATTON
AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS
HOW STUDENTS HAVE CHANGED

Changing family structures

Many of today's adults grew up in a family with two parents, in which the mother stayed at home with the children. But family structures have changed. In more and more families it is the norm for both parents to work outside the home. In addition, increasing numbers of children live with only one parent. About one-fourth of all California homes with children are single-parent households.

These changes in family structure have implications for the ease of parent-school communication, the availability of adults to supervise homework, the need for after-school child care or extracurricular activities, and the willingness of parents to volunteer time at schools. Schools are responding with new approaches such as more flexible scheduling of parent-teacher conferences and school-based homework help.

Influence of media and technology

The knowledge explosion is both exciting and troubling for students and schools. On the one hand, a growing number of young people have the world at their fingertips through resources like computers and the Internet. The expansive learning experiences created by new technologies can help many students reach higher levels of academic performance.

On the other hand, there is no denying that daily access and exposure to television, movies, and video games have given today's students a view of the world that their parents could not have imagined at the same age. Parents often feel their children's attitudes toward sexuality, violence, honesty, drug use, and personal relationships are too greatly influenced by the popular media.

Student exposure to media and comfort with technology have implications for what happens in the classroom as well. Many teachers find the use of technology helps students achieve at higher levels and focuses their attention and interest. But California's investment in technology for schools has been slow at best, with the state ranking near the bottom nationwide in the number of computers per student.

More students at higher risk

For a small but growing segment of California's students and schools, the societal problems of violence, poverty, drug abuse, racial tension, and teen pregnancy threaten to become overwhelming.

Poverty in particular is a powerful predictor of poor student performance. Several measures give a picture of the level of poverty among California's school children:

- It's estimated that one in four California children lives in poverty.
- The number of children in households receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) was 1.2 million in 1989, rose to nearly 1.7 million in 1993, and in 1996 reached 1.8 million.
- In 1996, about 2.5 million students participated in reduced-price school lunch programs in California's schools.

Of similar concern, a 1993-94 report by Southwest Regional Laboratories indicated that drug use among all students was increasing again after several years of decline. The rates of serious youth crime and teen births also remain at distressingly high levels, despite some progress.

All of this affects students' readiness to learn when they come to school, their behavior at school, and the level of support available at home for both the students and the schools. The challenges created by these situations are particularly acute for teachers and schools in the less affluent areas of inner cities and rural communities.

A DRAMATICALLY DIFFERENT POLITICAL, FINANCIAL, AND LEGAL ENVIRONMENT

More state control

Two landmark California actions in the late 1970s — the *Serrano* v. *Priest* court decision on funding equalization and the passage of Proposition 13 to cap local property tax rates — have had major impacts on local schools. One perhaps unintentional effect was to shift funding, and thus much of the control of schools, away from the local communities and into the hands of the Governor and state Legislature. In 1988, Proposition 98 set up a formula for how state leaders determine total state funding for public education.

California laws that changed school finance

Serrano v. Priest

The 1977 California Supreme Court ruling that the state had to equalize property tax rates and per pupil expenditures among school districts.

Proposition 13

A 1978 California constitutional amendment establishing a statewide property tax rate and limiting increases in assessed valuation.

Proposition 98

A 1988 constitutional amendment guaranteeing a minimum funding level for schools based on the California economy and state tax revenues, amended by Proposition 111 in 1990.

In response to this more centralized authority, large organized groups have become more effective in influencing education policies by acting at the state level. These include teacher and employee unions; associations for school administrators and school boards; lobbyists from the state's most populous districts and counties; and non-education interests such as businesses and real estate developers.

School policies also may be more vulnerable to shifts in the political climate than they were when local control was greater. Swings from liberal to conservative perspectives in Sacramento can have sweeping and sometimes disruptive effects on local schools. Twenty years of changing policies on everything from school uniforms to bilingual education demonstrate the point.

School funding eroded

Another legacy of Proposition 13 has been to reduce per-pupil funding for schools relative to inflation and the rest of the country. Large class sizes, cuts in support services, and poorly maintained facilities have been some of the results for California's students over the last 20 years.

Dean Nafziger, former executive director of the WestEd education research laboratory, has described the effect of the last two decades as "slow starvation" for schools. "It's taken time for the effects to show. Californians who've gradually learned to make do with less don't see the depth of erosion that's occurred in every aspect of our schools."

Beginning in 1995, a revived California economy and the resulting increases in state revenues brought some better funding news to schools. Nonetheless, California's per-pupil expenditure remained well below the national average in 1996-97.

More court mandates and legal restraints

In the past 25 years, schools have increasingly been sued on behalf of individual students, groups of students with special needs, and even entire communities of students, in desegregation cases for example.

Many of these lawsuits, and the resulting regulations concerning school operations, came in response to perceived abuses of student rights. Their net effect, however, has been to entangle schools in a complex web of requirements. Special Education rulings are a common target when people talk about the red tape school districts must contend with. Equally compelling are stories of school decisions made more to avoid lawsuits than improve education. Many critics believe this situation unnecessarily raises costs, reduces efficiency, and sometimes hurts the overall quality of education.

Loss of community identification

All of the state trends described above affect the relationship between schools and their communities. The widespread public distrust of government — most dramatically symbolized by Watergate in the 1970s — also has hurt schools. As a result of all of this, local school districts often find it difficult to build strong community support, even among parents.

And while the population of students is rising, the percentage of households with children in California has declined. In 1995 just four households out of 10 included children. Thus, a larger segment of the population — particularly the voting population — has little or no contact with local schools. This means schools have to work harder and more creatively to communicate with state and local taxpayers who provide the financial support for public education.

More demanding consumers

The past several decades have produced a broad cultural shift away from unquestioned respect for authority and spawned a new "informed consumerism" that has affected the work of government officials, doctors, lawyers, and educators. Many of today's parents feel personally empowered to protect their own interests and those of their children. More want a choice of school settings and a voice in decisions about standards, curriculum, teaching styles, dress codes, and student discipline — virtually everything that affects their children. This can have implications not only for school operations but also for those children who don't have such advocates.

Experts Say

"A GROWING GAP EXISTS BETWEEN WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE ARE LEARNING IN SCHOOL — A MORE RIGOROUS CURRICULUM THAN THEIR PARENTS TOOK — AND WHAT THEY NEED TO KNOW TO SUCCEED IN OUR TECHNOLOGICAL, INFORMATION-BASED SOCIETY. ... AMERICANS WILL NOT CONTINUE TO SUPPORT A SYSTEM THAT DOES NOT PREPARE THEIR CHILDREN FOR THE FUTURE."

WILLARD DAGGETT
INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATION

SCHOOLS ARE CHANGING WHAT AND HOW THEY TEACH

Something old, something new

Schools need to teach more and different things in order to prepare students for an increasingly complex and challenging world. Just as in "the good old days," students still need to read and write well and to learn basic math. But they also need many additional skills — using computers and other technology, working in groups, being able to think on their feet and solve problems creatively. This is true in almost any vocation or career today's students enter.

New research on learning

In recent years, educators have been presented with a wealth of new, well-substantiated information on how children learn, based on everything from brain research using new technologies to behavioral studies confirming "common wisdom." Education researchers in universities and in K-12

EXAMPLES OF HOW LEARNING THEORY IS AFFECTING TEACHING PRACTICES

- Research into how children learn to read and into effective reading instruction formed the basis for the 1996 California Reading Initiative. Among other things, it calls for schools to teach phonics, have children read a great deal, and provide early and intensive extra help to children who are having difficulties.

- It is widely accepted that students learn material best when they learn by doing. And they often learn more through social interaction and working together than working in isolation. For example, instead of simply reading about or watching a demonstration of how pulleys work, students may be working in teams to design and assemble their own pulley systems.

- Some researchers also believe that people learn in different ways. Citing Howard Gardner's work on multiple intelligences, some education reformers are encouraging teachers to present material in a variety of different "modalities." Students might learn their multiplication facts not only by writing them down and reciting them, but by working with blocks, singing songs, building the facts in clay, playing games that involve physical movement, and teaching them to another student.

- Brain researchers also have found that learning occurs when a person makes connections between new material and previous knowledge and experience. Encouraging students to actively make these connections — through, for example, an essay that compares a character in a book to one they've read about before — is considered by many to be a powerful instructional strategy.

EdSource 1998

schools also have been conducting research on effective teaching methods and strategies. As a result of these two phenomena, school personnel and education researchers are searching for the best ways to integrate new theories and methods with traditional teaching approaches that also are effective. The goal is to identify and further the use of "best practices."

Widespread change in teaching practices does not happen quickly or spontaneously. It requires continuing education for teachers and administrators. In many school districts, teachers are being challenged to understand learning and educational research more fully and develop teaching techniques that take advantage of these new findings. The districts, in turn, are attempting to fund additional professional development and organize it in new ways that build teacher capacity and lead to improved student learning.

Experts Say

"The education challenge facing the United States is not that its schools are not as good as they once were. It is that schools must help the vast majority of young people reach levels of skill and competence once thought within the reach of only a few."

What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future
National Commission on Teaching and America's Future

TODAY'S SCHOOLS FACE MANY CHALLENGES

- *A more diverse student body.*
- *Changing family structures.*
- *Pervasive media influences.*
- *New technologies.*
- *A changing and more demanding workplace.*
- *Less local control and community support.*
- *Eroded school funding.*
- *More demanding consumers.*
- *New theories on how students learn.*
- *Higher expectations for all students.*

The emergence of these new demands — without a simultaneous thoughtful and broad-based re-examination of public education's mission — has created a new problem for schools. In many communities, the gap is large between what schools are doing and what the public expects them to do. This has led to strong criticism from the outside and great frustration for educators on the inside.

Central to this gap has been the lack of a clear consensus within communities — among educators and parents, and among schools, business, and government — about what we want schools to do. There is little agreement about what success looks like.

Throughout California, school communities are beginning conversations about what the goals for public education should be in the 21st century, whether today's schools can meet those goals, and if not, what changes are needed. State-level task forces and initiatives are addressing many of the same issues on a broader scale. In addition, an improved state economy and a growing consensus about the need for change make this a time of real opportunity for meaningful school improvement.

To effectively strengthen public schools in California, all members of the school community — school employees, policymakers, parents, and others — first need to make sure everyone has the facts. Participants in school improvement efforts will find those efforts more fruitful if they have a shared base of information and a common understanding of the complexities involved in school change. They also need a sense of how interconnected different education issues can be, from curriculum and student performance, to teaching and instruction, to school funding, the governance system, and accountability.

CALIFORNIANS SAY

"California should provide a good public education to all children."
Agree: 85%

"What is more important in making California the kind of place you want to live in the future?"

Education 51%	**OR**	**Fighting Crime** 41%
Education 77%	**OR**	**Cutting Taxes** 21%
Education 77%	**OR**	**Environmental Protection** 19%

Data: California Public Education Partnership
Priority One: Schools That Work, 1996

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FOR MORE INFORMATION ...

21st. Century Challenges

The Challenge to American Schools — Preparing Students for the 21st Century
Willard R. Daggett

In this February 1996 presentation to the U.S. Education Summit, the author explores the question of what students need to know and be able to do in today's changing society, and compares the U.S. approach to curriculum with that of other countries.

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How Students Have Changed
Julia Stratton

Based on questionnaires sent to school administrators nationwide, this booklet provides a perspective on how educators see students themselves changing. American Association of School Administrators, 1995

Preparing Students for the 21st Century
Donna Uchida with Marvin Cetron and Floretta McKenzie

Drawing on the opinions of an expert panel, this study explores what students need to know, how schools can change accordingly, and the critical roles of parents, citizens, business, and government in this effort. American Association of School Administrators, 1996

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Schools for the 21st Century: Leadership Imperatives for Educational Reform
Phillip C. Schlechty

The author presents ideas for restructuring schools to meet the needs of an information-based, knowledge-work society, and he provides a framework for managing school change. Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1990

The Schools We Need & Why We Don't Have Them
E.D. Hirsch, Jr.

In this critique of American public schools, the author argues that "progressive" school practices have hurt students' ability and desire to learn. He calls for a new emphasis on hard work, the learning of specific content, and rigorous testing. Doubleday, 1996

Relationship Between Schools and Community

Building Community
John W. Gardner

In this paper, the author describes the wholesale deterioration of American communities, identifies essential elements of communities, and suggests specific "Steps towards Solutions" to help reverse the trend. 1991

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Californians' Views on Education: Results of the PACE 1996 Poll

This report provides the results of public opinion research on education issues based on a statewide phone poll of 803 Californians. Copies available for $4 (prepaid, checks payable to UC Regents). Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE), 1996

PACE, School of Education
Tolman Hall
University of California
Berkeley, CA 94720-1670
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fax: 510/642-9148

Priority One: Schools That Work

This 1996 public opinion research finds that Californians' top concern is improving public education and provides the public perspective on how school success might be defined. California Public Education Partnership, 1996

Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning
355 Shake Mill Road
Santa Cruz, CA 95060
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Travels Without Charley
John E. Jennings

In this article, the director of the Center on National Education Policy identifies four causes of the public's skeptical attitude towards public education — negative news media, the disengagement of educators, the Far Right's disproportionately large share of voice, and a lack of consensus as a nation about what we want from the schools. *Phi Delta Kappan*, September 1996

Do We Still Need Public Schools?* and *The Good — and Not-So-Good — News About American Schools
Center on National Education Policy

Continuing the ideas presented by its director in the article "Travels Without Charley," these two short booklets focus on the basic premises of education in a democratic society and the available accurate data on school performance.

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Changes in Education Theory and Practice

Reflections on Multiple Intelligences: Myths and Messages
Howard Gardner

The author discusses seven myths that have grown up about multiple intelligences and attempts to set the record straight by presenting seven complementary "realities." *Phi Delta Kappan*, November 1995

Mobilizing for Competitiveness

This report proposes goals and strategies for upgrading and more tightly linking California's K-16 education and job training system to employment. California Business Roundtable, January 1994

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Tinkering Towards Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform
David Tyack and Larry Cuban

Blending political and institutional analysis, the authors of this scholarly work explore the history of educational reform and the tension that has long existed between Americans' intense faith in education and the slow pace of change in educational practices. Harvard University Press, 1995

Related EdSource Publications

How California Compares

A comparison of California's status on a variety of school quality measures — including student performance, school funding, teachers, and school reform efforts — compared with that of other states and the nation as a whole. October 1995

Where Californians Stand on Education

This report on public opinion research in California puts recent polls about schools into a broader context. December 1996

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IF YOU'RE WONDERING

How are schools changing what they teach?
— turn to Curriculum, Section B.

How can we tell if students are learning what they need to?
— turn to Student Performance, Section C.

How do we make sure teachers have the skills they need?
— turn to Teaching and Instruction, Section D.

How are schools funded?
— turn to School Funding, Section E, and The System, Section F.

What role can the community play in strengthening public schools?
— turn to Shared Responsibility, Section G.

NOTES ... QUESTIONS ... IDEAS ...

Curriculum

WHAT STUDENTS NEED TO KNOW AND BE ABLE TO DO

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IN CALIFORNIA TODAY	B-3
What subjects should schools teach?	B-3
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ABOUT THIS SECTION

FOCAL POINTS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Strengthening the basics in grades 1-3: reading well, writing clearly, applying math skills
- Ensuring students understand and can use technology
- Beyond the basics, deciding what other subjects and skills students most need
- Increasing the depth, challenge, and relevance of all courses
- Re-examining the importance of character and civic education
- Preparing all students to be citizens, workers, and learners in the 21st century

What should schools teach? Within such vast subject areas as English, social studies, history, mathematics, science, foreign language, physical education, and the arts, what knowledge and abilities are vital? And how do the various parts of the curriculum fit together from subject to subject and over time as students progress through school? Creating a K-12 school curriculum requires answers to such questions.

Coming to agreement about curriculum often seems simple — until the various members of the school community really get down to specifics. Everyone can agree that first graders need to learn addition and subtraction. But do they need to be taught how to use calculators? It's fine for seventh graders to study world history, but should that include a detailed comparison of religions? Students need to learn how to use computers, but does something else in the curriculum need to go? Is it more important for a high school graduate to be able to interpret Shakespeare or a technical manual? Should all students be exposed to music and art, and how much is enough?

What subjects are taught and the content within each subject: these issues are at the heart of what students will learn in California's public schools. They are central to an examination and discussion of curriculum by educators, policymakers, parents, and other community members. And curriculum is the starting point for coordinating every other facet of school operations.

Death Valley

IN CALIFORNIA TODAY

WHAT SUBJECTS SHOULD SCHOOLS TEACH?

The basics — are schools teaching them well or not?

Virtually everyone agrees that schools must teach children how to read, write, and speak English, plus do basic math and science. But when you ask, "Aren't they already doing that?" agreement begins to evaporate.

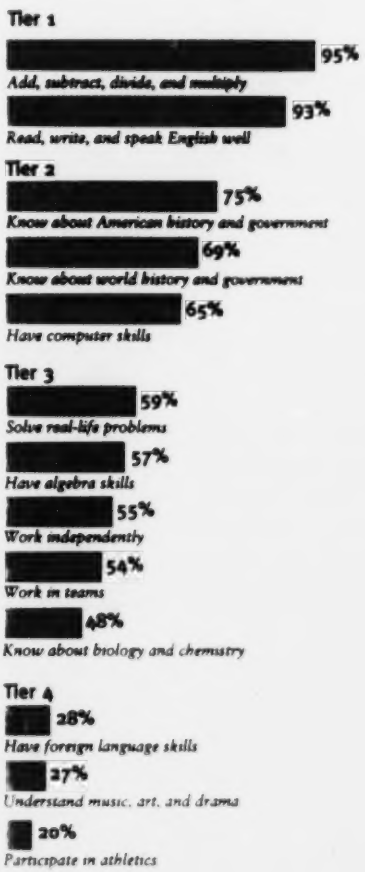
Some people use scores on standardized tests and anecdotes to argue that schools aren't doing as well as they used to, particularly at teaching children basic skills. They are concerned that learning the basics has been downplayed at the expense of students.

But others use different statewide data — such as improving SAT scores and decreasing dropout rates — to show that schools are doing better than ever at meeting the "traditional goals" of education for a larger percentage of students. The problem, this camp contends, is twofold: First, we want more students educated to higher levels. And second, basic skills alone are no longer sufficient to prepare students for today's more challenging world. Today's students need to learn more than previous generations did.

California's performance on national assessments of reading and math bolsters the argument that the basics are being neglected. Meanwhile, a recent international evaluation of U.S. math and science curricula indicts our country's approach as ineffective in today's world. The key is to find the right balance between teaching basic skills better and teaching newer and more advanced skills.

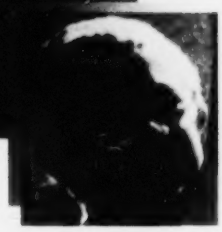
Californians Say

WHAT ARE THE BASICS?
To graduate, students should ...



Data: California Public Education Partnership *Priority One: Schools That Work*, 1996

EdSource 1998



Experts Say

"THE 'BASICS' OF YESTERYEAR ALONE SIMPLY DO NOT PREPARE TODAY'S STUDENTS FOR A CAREER OR COLLEGE IN THE 21ST CENTURY. WE NEED A MODERN DEFINITION OF THE BASICS WHICH EMPHASIZES THE 'NEW' AS WELL AS THE 'OLD' SKILLS. TODAY, COMPUTERS, TECHNOLOGY, SCIENCE TRAINING, AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING ARE THE BASICS NEEDED FOR STUDENTS TO COMPETE IN COLLEGE OR IN THE WORKFORCE OF THE NEXT CENTURY."

CALIFORNIA TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

Beyond "the basics"

Indeed, there is evidence that the public wants schools to go well beyond "the basics" and do so for all students. Increasingly, computer literacy is considered a new fundamental. About three-fourths of California adults also believe that learning about history and government should be required for high school graduation. And large majorities of Californians believe schools should formally teach about civic responsibility (63%) and "an understanding and respect for people of different races and cultures" (79%).

Beyond this common ground, various groups differ in their emphasis on what is essential for schools to teach. Public opinion research in the United States as a whole and in California reveals some differences in opinion that could affect how schools set their priorities. For example:

- Californians are somewhat split on whether foreign language, an appreciation of the arts, and participation in athletics are important or unimportant.

CALIFORNIANS SAY

Californians Rate School Subjects

While they agree on much of what's important, Californians are split on whether the following subjects should be requirements in the school curriculum.

	Foreign language skills	Music, art & drama	Participation in athletics
Required for graduation	28%	27%	20%
Very Important	34%	33%	34%
Somewhat Important	25%	29%	30%
Not Important	13%	11%	16%

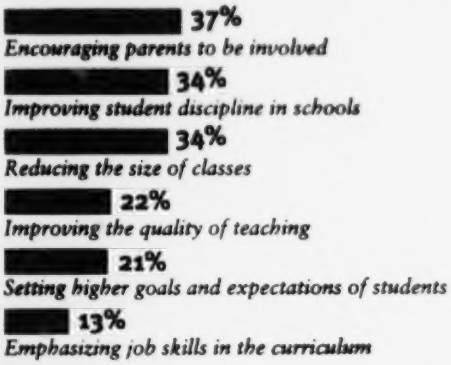
Data: California Public Education Partnership
Priority One: Schools That Work, 1996

EdSource 1998

- Parents tend to want the schools to "do it all" — both in the classroom and with extracurricular activities, such as sports, and additional services, such as counseling and day care.
- Some people believe complex academic subjects are the highest priority (such as algebra, chemistry, foreign language, and computer skills), and others see "process skills" as most important (such as the ability to work independently, the ability to work in a team, and real-life problem-solving skills).
- Meanwhile, educators, particularly at the high school level, often see college entrance requirements as the most powerful force shaping curriculum — despite the fact that about 40% of California's students don't go to college.
- A 1997 national survey of high school students by Public Agenda (a national nonpartisan research and education organization) showed that the majority of young people did not see traditional academic subjects — such as science, advanced math, and history — as extremely important for them to learn before finishing high school.

Californians Say

THESE MEASURES WILL IMPROVE PUBLIC SCHOOLS



Data: Policy Analysis for California Education, 1996 EdSource 1998

STATE REQUIREMENTS AND GUIDELINES

In principle, the school board in each local district determines the subjects to teach and how to teach them, within the parameters set by the state. In practice, state requirements and recommendations are having an increasingly strong influence on local choices.

First, the state specifies some subjects that all California public schools must teach (see page B-6). Second, the State Board of Education (SBE) approves a curriculum framework for each subject. The framework provides an outline of what should be included in a given course of study and is meant to

guide school districts. (See the Student Performance section for information on how California's statewide student performance standards could affect the development process for curriculum frameworks.)

Finally, the SBE recommends curriculum materials and approaches. For grades K-8, the SBE must adopt several textbooks and other instructional materials for each subject area and each grade level. The state also gives school districts funds to purchase materials, and a district must choose a set percentage of its textbooks from the approved list in order to receive those funds. Districts can request a waiver if they find non-adopted materials more appropriate for their schools. For high schools, the SBE approves Curriculum Standards, with which all high schools must compare their curricula for each subject and grade level every three years. Ultimately, however, the local school board decides on its own schools' textbooks and curriculum.

The Law Says

COURSES REQUIRED IN CALIFORNIA

GRADES K-8

The SBE must approve instructional materials in these subject areas:

- Language Arts (including spelling)
- Mathematics
- Reading
- Science
- Social Science
- Bilingual or Bicultural Studies
- Other areas of study that the SBE or local school districts choose to add

HIGH SCHOOL (9-12)

Schools must offer the following courses, but students are not required to take them all to graduate. School boards can add to these courses and can adopt district graduation requirements beyond what the state requires.

- English
- Social Science
- Science
- Mathematics
- Visual and Performing Arts
- Foreign Language
- Physical Education
- Applied Arts
- Drivers Education
- Vocational-Technical Education
- Parenting Skills and Education

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION AND COLLEGE ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS

Minimum Requirements for High School Graduation (Individual districts may have higher requirements)

- English — 3 years
- Mathematics — 2 years
- History/Social Science — 3 years
- Science — 2 years
- Foreign Language, Visual and Performing Arts — 1 year of either
- Physical Education — 2 years

The "a-f" Minimum Requirements for Admission to the University of California*

- English — 4 years
- Mathematics — 3 years
- History-Social Science — 2 years
- Lab Science — 2 years
- Foreign Language — 2 years
- Prescribed Electives, primarily from the above subjects — 2 years

* *The California State University system also requires a year of visual and performing arts.*

EdSource 1998

CURRICULUM ISSUES DIFFER BY GRADE LEVEL

GRADES K-6

Goals: In kindergarten through third grade, students are expected to acquire the basic reading, writing, and math skills that will provide a solid foundation for future learning. In the upper elementary grades, students are expected to begin mastering these basic skills and to use them to learn other subjects, such as social studies and science.

Challenges: Schools are trying to balance "tried and true" methods of teaching the basics with new research that shows student learning can improve when school instruction:

- is connected to what students already know;
- is centered on information and real-life experiences that have meaning for them; and
- challenges them to think for themselves.

Some key issues: • What curriculum and materials should schools use to effectively teach all children to read? To learn math? • How do schools strike the right balance between teaching younger children basic knowledge and facts (who was the first president?) and teaching them how to think about those facts (if you had been alive in 1776, would you have been for the Americans or the British — and why?) • Should schools use bilingual instruction as a strategy for helping non-English-speaking students learn to read and learn English? • To what extent does smaller class size improve student performance?

Based on recommendations made in It's Elementary, *California Department of Education, 1992.*

GRADES 6-8

Goals: In the middle grades, students need to develop the skills, knowledge base, and habits they'll need to be successful in the even more demanding academic environment of high school. This is also when they need to begin to understand the purpose of school and develop a personal commitment to their own educational goals.

Challenges: Schools are striving to emphasize academic rigor, while paying attention to young adolescents' personal and social development and their need for a sense of belonging.

Some key issues: • Are schools for this age group organized so they challenge students academically while also providing them with a sense of personal connection to their teachers? • What impact do the classes students take in the middle-years have on high school placements, and how does that affect students' educational and work opportunities after they graduate? • What methods should we use to teach subjects so students see the relationships between them?

Based on recommendations made in Caught In the Middle, *California Department of Education, 1987.*

GRADES 9-12

Goals: Students need appropriate and adequate preparation for higher education and for adult success as wage-earners and citizens of a democracy. This includes exposure to a rigorous core curriculum of English, math, history, and science.

Challenges: Schools want to ensure that all students' courses of study match their aspirations and that each student has an effective, challenging educational program, and, conversely, to make sure that the system does not limit a student's options.

Some key issues: • How can schools most effectively integrate academic instruction and career preparation? What should be the balance between core curriculum and electives? • To what extent and at what point should students be offered different levels of instruction such as Advanced Placement classes and non-college prep math? • Are students better served in high schools that offer a broad range of choices or in schools designed to focus on specific interests (such as performing arts, communications, or science/technology)? • What level of educational attainment should the system strive for? Is the following suggested target what your community expects?

- At least 25% of high school graduates should go on to earn bachelor's degrees;
- 25% should earn associate or equivalent degrees from community college;
- 40% should make a successful transition from school to work; and
- No more than 10% should drop out.

Based on recommendations made in Second to None, *California Department of Education, 1992.*

ISSUES AND TRENDS

TOUGH QUESTIONS ABOUT CURRICULUM

- What is the best balance between state and local control of curriculum decisions?
- What are the trade-offs between schools covering the breadth of a curriculum area versus covering fewer topics in greater depth?
- Should all students study the same curriculum? Or at what point should choices be made and different paths be made available?
- Should civics and or values education be part of the formal school curriculum?

A STATE-LEVEL INITIATIVE TO IMPROVE READING

California has made reading instruction in the early grades (K-3) a major curriculum focus. A call to action at the state level has focused resources on early reading instruction, put new demands on educators, and called for public and leadership support of a single goal: all children in California should read at or above grade level by the end of third grade.

An almost last-place showing by the state's fourth graders in reading on the 1994 National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) was a catalyst. In addition, public concerns about teaching the basics, a strong base of new research about effective reading instruction, and additional state funds that had to be allocated to K-12 education all contributed to the timing and scope of this effort. With a 1996-97 investment of close to $1 billion for reducing K-3 class sizes and improving reading instruction, and more funding in 1997-98, reading or "literacy" took center stage in many schools' conversations about curriculum.

Included along with the state moneys was a very specific set of state guidelines regarding how reading should be taught and a newly approved choice of instructional materials. The goal is for California to have a balanced, comprehensive reading program that has both a strong literature and comprehension program and an organized, explicit skills program that includes phonics.

This new state program has ignited both excitement and debate about reading instruction. While some observers applaud the state vision and leadership, others express concern about the extent and specificity of state-level direction. They say it has a negative impact

on local school districts' ability to fashion curriculum appropriate to their community.

Upcoming curriculum initiatives and adoptions, including a major re-examination of the teaching of mathematics, may reveal whether the reading initiative has set a new precedent regarding the balance of state and local control over curriculum decisions, or whether it was simply a unique circumstance.

The Law Says

IT IS THE STATE'S RESPONSIBILITY "TO ESTABLISH BROAD MINIMUM STANDARDS AND GENERAL EDUCATIONAL GUIDELINES FOR THE SELECTION OF INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS FOR [ALL] PUBLIC SCHOOLS, BUT ... BECAUSE OF ECONOMIC, GEOGRAPHIC, PHYSICAL, POLITICAL, EDUCATIONAL, AND SOCIAL DIVERSITY, SPECIFIC CHOICES ABOUT INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS NEED TO BE MADE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL."

CALIFORNIA EDUCATION CODE SECTION 60000

ONGOING CRITIQUE OF EXISTING CURRICULUM

As schools at all levels attempt to prepare students better for the changing workplace and society, numerous other curriculum changes are being suggested. Educators, policymakers, businesspeople, and the public have offered different approaches and different priorities for what students should be learning.

More rigor

Many people believe the traditional school curriculum and approaches are a vital, appropriate foundation for a high-quality education. They say schools should focus on providing all students with sound instruction in the core subjects.

This view influenced the 1983 passage in California of Senate Bill 813, which established higher state requirements for the classwork students must complete to earn a high school diploma. Today, it also is driving the development of new academic content standards, intended to specify state-level expectations of the knowledge and skills students should learn at each grade level. (See the Student Performance section for more information.)

Some education reformers, however, say that just strengthening the traditional curriculum is not enough. They urge a more comprehensive examination of what students are taught and how.

Experts Say

"When school knowledge is not credible to students, they opt out and decide to wait until 'later' to learn 'what you really need to know.'"

William Glasser
The Quality School

Experts Say

"The math, science, and language arts skills and knowledge needed for employment in today's workplace are both different from and more sophisticated than those needed for higher education ... But we continue to define excellence in American schools exclusively by what students need for college. ... Being prepared for higher education is still important, but it is simply not enough."

Willard Daggett
International Center for Leadership in Education

More relevance

Schools need to work harder, others say, to engage students more fully in their school work. If schools helped students better understand how this work is relevant to their lives and goals, students might be more committed and disciplined. In turn, this might address pervasive concerns about safety and order on school campuses.

A 1997 inquiry into student opinions by Public Agenda backs this view. In *Getting By: What American Teenagers Really Think About Their Schools*, the authors say many teens seem unable to form any connection between their academic courses in school, such as history and math, and broader questions about the world and the people in it. "Instead, the youngsters slogged through their academic courses, clearing the hurdles adults put in their way, but viewing them as utterly inconsequential to their current or future lives. They found adult insistence that they study them — usually in the form of graduation or college entrance requirements — altogether mystifying."

More depth

Many argue that public schools should try to cover fewer topics and teach each in much more depth, as European and Asian countries tend to do. In the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), researchers reported that the United States lacks a "coherent vision of how to educate today's children" in mathematics and science. The result, the authors contend, is unfocused curricula and textbooks, and teaching that is "a mile wide and an inch deep."

A related priority is to give students more opportunities to apply what they are learning: for instance, instead of being satisfied that students know the rules of grammar, have students actually demonstrate that they can write a persuasive letter to the local newspaper or a lively short story using proper grammar. Emphasize lab work and hands-on science. Have students work more in teams and on complex projects that last for a long time, even up to a year.

More of all three

"School to career" is an approach to curriculum favored by many education organizations, business leaders, and educators. Academic learning and career exploration are connected throughout the curriculum for students going on to college as well as those heading straight for work. The idea is for all students to experience a rigorous curriculum that prepares them for higher education and real-life situations.

CLARIFYING HOW CURRICULUM IS CONNECTED

For parents, students, and often educators, it's not always clear how learning at one grade level is connected to what is taught the following year. "Articulation," the educators' term for this issue, sometimes presents tremendous challenges.

While some state curriculum guidelines address this, the problems persist. Experts have found there is often no continuity in what students are taught from one grade to the next, even in the same school. The problem is particularly acute as students enter high school. The fact that in California, K-8 schools and high schools are sometimes run by different districts complicates this even further. Increasingly, many school districts are addressing these issues in their planning, staff development, and curriculum decisions.

Related to this question of articulation are issues of pathways for students. Early choices and placements often have long-term, subtle, and unpredictable consequences for children's futures — consequences many parents and educators don't foresee until it's too late.

Educators, parents, and students need a clear and mutual understanding about existing curriculum pathways and choices. Discussions of these issues may also prompt the school community to examine whether existing curriculum strategies and course offerings effectively serve local students.

BREADTH VERSUS DEPTH IN MATH AND SCIENCE

Number of topics in fourth- and eighth-grade math texts

U.S.	**30 to 35**
Germany	**20**
Japan	**10**

Number of topics in fourth-, eighth-, and 12th-grade science texts

U.S.	**50 to 65**
Germany	**7**
Japan	**5 to 15**

The authors of the *Third International Mathematics and Science Study* criticize the lack of focus in both math and science curricula in the U.S., comparing with Germany and Japan the number of topics students and teachers are expected to cover.

Data: TIMSS, 1997 EdSource 1998

DEFINING SCHOOLS' ROLE IN TEACHING VALUES

Often, observers decry the demands put on American schools, specifically citing recent additions to the school curriculum that are not strictly academic. Classes in sex education, parenting, driver's education, nutrition, and drug awareness, they say, divert precious and limited school resources from what's important.

At the same time, many people feel that one area of non-academic instruction is vital and often ignored. In fact, two separate polls conducted in 1996 showed that the vast majority of Californians agree that schools should teach the responsibilities of citizenship (civic education) and certain social values such as honesty and responsibility (character education). Many believe that growing public concerns about order and safety in schools reflect in some measure schools' abandonment or de-emphasis of this part of the traditional curriculum.

In 1994, Public Agenda reported great agreement among many groups of Americans on several core values that should be taught in school. These included honesty, respect for others regardless of ethnic background, and the ability to solve problems without violence. Students surveyed by Public Agenda also appear to agree on these values.

Some experts in the field of civic and character education contend that a formal curriculum alone cannot accomplish the goal of instilling such core values as trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, justice, fairness, integrity, and caring. Instead, schools also need to examine their informal curriculum: the consistency with which discipline standards are enforced, for example, and the level of respect demanded of teachers as well as students.

The Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character at Boston University's School of Education stresses that schools cannot assume this responsibility alone. Families, neighborhoods, and faith communities must all share this task.

But underneath this agreement lie concerns and conflicts that reflect the diversity of our society. Can we really agree on some core values? And does the community trust its public school educators to teach them? Are there clear lines beyond which such teaching should not go?

Experts Say

"YOUNGSTERS NEED A STRONG PREPARATION IN HISTORY AND CIVICS, ART AND LITERATURE, MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE, AS WELL AS COMMAND OF A FOREIGN LANGUAGE. THOSE WHO DEVELOP SKILL AND KNOWLEDGE IN THE ACADEMIC DISCIPLINES ARE ALSO LIKELY TO DEVELOP THE SKILLS IN PROBLEM-SOLVING AND COMMUNICATION THAT ARE SO IMPORTANT FOR WORK AND CITIZENSHIP."

EDUCATION REFORM 1995-96
THE EDUCATION EXCELLENCE NETWORK

Experts Say

"SCHOOLS BEAR A SPECIAL AND HISTORIC RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMPETENT AND RESPONSIBLE CITIZENS."

THE ROLE OF CIVIC EDUCATION
THE COMMUNITARIAN NETWORK

WAYS TO GET INVOLVED

ACTIONS TO TAKE

Start by learning about the curriculum

At your school: How does your school approach various subjects in the curriculum? How are reading and writing being taught? Is this changing in your school? How is math being taught? At the middle and high school levels, how does your school differ from others in terms of the courses it offers, particularly elective and advanced courses?

In your school district: Most districts publish a list or guide to the subjects and content they teach and what they expect children to learn at each grade level. Do you know what those are? If you're an educator, do you know what the expectations are outside of the level where you personally work? These publications are usually available at schools and district offices.

In California as a whole: What levels of reading and math performance are required for college eligibility? What do business leaders say students need to know? What is recommended in the state curriculum frameworks? What are the philosophies and research behind these state-level recommendations?

Look at the sequence in which courses are offered

In your local school and district: Parents should look beyond their child's grade in school to get a feeling for the whole course of study, and teachers should be conversant with the curriculum content in other grades as well as the one they teach. Does it appear that the curriculum is well-coordinated from one grade level to the next? Will the courses taken now ensure options for students later?

In California as a whole: How does the state's curriculum adoption cycle and approach help or hinder your district's ability to provide an effective, well-sequenced curriculum?

"I want **some say** *in what my son is* **taught** *at school."*

"Educators **know best.** *Don't they?"*

"*Our children need* **job skills.**"

"*Just* **make sure** *my daughter can get into* **college.**"

Be part of the curriculum review process

In your school district: All school districts undergo a formal curriculum review process, but not all open this process to the public. Does yours? Call your district superintendent's office and ask. If not, encourage the school board and superintendent to do so, and offer to serve on the community committee.

When your district announces new textbook adoptions, parents and other community representatives can show their interest by participating in the public review, examining what the textbooks will cover, and providing constructive, honest feedback.

In California as a whole: The state has a regular schedule for evaluation and adoption of its curriculum frameworks and approved instructional materials. The process always includes opportunities for public input, and your school district should have the current schedule. Stay informed and make your voice heard.

Consider how well your school district supports student course selection, particularly in high school

In your local school and district: The classes a student selects in middle school as well as high school affect both graduation requirements and admission into college. Parents need to understand what kind of course selection is most appropriate for their child and what these choices will mean at high school graduation. School personnel need to make sure student counseling provides meaningful assistance to students and clear information to parents.

In California as a whole: Many schools in California do not have enough guidance counselors to provide individual attention to help students plan their coursework. Can and should anything be done at the state level to make sure schools are better able to provide adequate student counseling services? Are there any creative, cost-effective new models for doing so?

Discuss values education in your community

In your local school and district: Finding ways to formally teach civic responsibilities and values such as honesty is becoming a higher priority for many. Does your school have a formal curriculum that covers these issues? Would you like to see one adopted? What about the "informal" curriculum: What standards of honesty, respect, responsible behavior, and

personal accountability does your school maintain for adults and students alike? What subjects are you willing to have a values curriculum address, and what issues are you uncomfortable with or opposed to? Are you willing to work constructively with school board members, educators, and parents to find a curriculum that works for all?

"Whose **values** *are we talking about?"*

"Whose view of **history** *is this?"*

WHERE TO GO FOR ANSWERS

Teachers can explain the subjects they cover in their own classrooms.

School principals and high school advisors have a picture of how curriculum in every class and grade level fits together.

District office personnel responsible for curriculum and instruction should be able to explain the adoption process and opportunities for public input. They can also tell you how the curriculum between elementary, middle school, and high school is coordinated.

The local school board displays materials and holds public hearings before giving final approval to the curriculum materials used in your district. These activities generally are publicized, and the district superintendent also has a schedule.

The Legislature and Governor, through California law, can act on behalf of citizens to make changes in the basic course of study required in all public schools.

The California Department of Education (CDE) works with diverse groups of educators, parents, and business leaders to write the curriculum frameworks, model curriculum guides, and other documents that guide the development of school district curriculum. A long-established curriculum adoption schedule guides this process, although some changes in the schedule do occur.

The State Board of Education receives public input as it deliberates whether to adopt the CDE's recommendations on curriculum frameworks and textbooks.

IF YOU'RE WONDERING

How do we know if students are learning the curriculum, and how good is good enough?
— **turn to Student Performance, Section C.**

Do teachers have the skills and knowledge to teach the curriculum we want, and are schools organized so they can?
— **turn to Teaching and Instruction, Section D.**

Who has the power to change the curriculum?
— **turn to The System, Section F.**

FOR MORE INFORMATION ...

California Department of Education

Caught in the Middle

This report presents a reform agenda for grades 6-8 focused on meeting the academic and social needs of middle grade students. 1987

It's Elementary!

Developed by the Elementary Grades Task Force, this report provides a comprehensive set of recommendations for transforming K-6 education. 1992

Second to None

To meet the challenges of an information- and knowledge-based society, this brief calls for a strong academic foundation in the first two years of high school and demanding, yet flexible program majors for students in grades 11 and 12. 1992

For copies, any of California's K-12 Curriculum Frameworks, or a full catalog of CDE publications, contact:

California Department of Education
Bureau of Publications, Sales Unit
P.O. Box 271
Sacramento, CA 95812-0271
800/995-4099
fax: 916/323-0823
www.cde.ca.gov/publications/Pubs.html

Public Agenda

Assignment Incomplete: The Unfinished Business of School Reform
Jean Johnson

This public opinion study probes the public's views on standards and basics, tests the public's commitment to the current system of public education, and examines the public's views of knowledge and learning. 1995

First Things First: What Americans Expect from the Public Schools
Jean Johnson and John Immerwahr

Results of national public opinion research on public education reveals concerns about safety, order, and the teaching of basic skills. 1994

Getting By: What American Teenagers Really Think About Their Schools

This public opinion study presents the views of American public and private high school students on education, schools, and teachers based on a national telephone survey and focus group research. 1997

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Other Publications

Education Reform 1995-96
Chester E. Finn, Jr. and Diane Ravitch

In their third annual report card on the progress of education reform in the U.S., the authors award schools an overall C grade based on evaluations of achievement, standards, "reinventing" education, instruction, and the federal role. 1996

Hudson Institute
P.O. Box 26-919
Indianapolis, IN 46226
800/HUDSON-0
www.edexcellence.net

Finding Common Ground: A First Amendment Guide to Religion and Public Education
Charles C. Haynes, Editor

This guide argues for the need to find a constitutional and educational role for religion in the public schools, advocating not the teaching of religion but the need to teach about religion. 1994

Freedom Forum
First Amendment Center
1207 18th Avenue South
Nashville, TN 37212
615/321-9588

Growing Smart: What's Working for Girls in School

A comprehensive review of themes and supporting action strategies to promote the achievement and healthy development of girls from K-12. 1995

American Association of University Women Educational Fund
Sales Office, Dept. 327
P.O. Box 251
Annapolis Junction, MD 20701
800/225-9998, ext. 327

The Challenge to American Schools
Willard R. Daggett

See the **Changing World** section.

The Manufactured Crisis
David C. Berliner and Bruce J. Biddle

Along with debunking "familiar but untrue statistics about public schools," the authors provide recommendations for how schools can and should improve. Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1995

Maximizing School Board Leadership: Curriculum

Part of a training curriculum and publication series, this material discusses the school board's role in curriculum, outlines steps to fulfill this role, and suggests criteria for self-evaluation. 1996

California School Boards Association
P.O. Box 1660
West Sacramento, CA 95691
916/371-4691

Priority One: Schools That Work

See the **Changing World** section.

The Quality School
William Glasser

To improve schools and attain quality in education, Glasser explains how administrators and teachers must employ management techniques that stress cooperation rather than coercion. HarperCollins Publishing, 1992

Responsibility, Respect, Results: Lessons for Life

Sponsored by the American Federation of Teachers, this information pamphlet outlines its national campaign for high standards of conduct and achievement, including a bill of rights and responsibilities for learning. 1997

American Federation of Teachers
555 New Jersey Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20001-2079

The Role of Civic Education
Charles Quigley

This task force paper involves a nationwide discussion of civic education, including what its principal goals should be, evidence of its need, its relationship to character education, the characteristics of successful programs, and how civic education can be revitalized. 1995

Communitarian Network
2130 H Street, NW, Suite 714
Washington, DC 20052
202/994-7997 or 800/245-7460;
fax: 202/994-1606
www.gwu.edu/~ccps/

The Schools We Need & Why We Don't Have Them
E.D. Hirsch, Jr.

See the **Changing World** section.

NOTES ... QUESTIONS ... IDEAS ...

Student Performance

WHAT WE CAN AND SHOULD EXPECT

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ABOUT THIS SECTION

FOCAL POINTS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Raising expectations for student performance and creating standards leading to the achievement of excellence.
- Finding valid, reliable and fair methods for measuring student performance.
- Agreeing on fair ways to apply the standards, plus expectations for how schools will help students who have difficulty meeting them.
- Committing to consistent enforcement of student behavior standards and clear consequences for those who don't follow them.
- Making sure schools, colleges, the community and students share a common understanding of what is expected.

What should students be learning in school and how well have they learned it? How will we know for sure? When these essential questions have been answered, you have a picture of student performance. Two major school improvement issues are involved: setting high enough standards for student performance (what and how well?), and agreeing on ways to test and assess student performance (how will we know?).

Most Americans believe students should be held to higher academic standards. Unfortunately, this seemingly straightforward idea brings up some difficult issues, including questions of who should set out the expectations and what happens if a student can't meet them.

Decisions about the standards themselves are also complex. For example, what quality of writing or math skills or reading is adequate for a first grader or a high school graduate? What is the standard for excellence? We also need ways to fairly and accurately evaluate and measure students' progress against those standards. But what kinds of tests and assessments are best?

Increasingly, educators, the public, and students themselves believe that issues of order in schools also are having an impact on students' academic performance. So this section deals with another set of standards as well — for student behavior.

Student performance — which includes academic standards, assessment, and student behavior — is getting increased attention in California. How big an impact these areas will have on improving student achievement depends on how well they are aligned with one another and with other facets of school operation.

Golden Gate Bridge

IN CALIFORNIA TODAY

STANDARDS ARE IN THE SPOTLIGHT

In his 1997 State of the Union Address, President Clinton called for "a national crusade" for more challenging standards. That crusade has certainly begun in California, with both state and local standard-setting efforts well under way. Local, state, and national standards are intended to work together to help schools address local concerns while creating some consistency among schools, districts, and perhaps even states.

THE PUBLIC SAYS

In *First Things First*, a 1994 report on national public opinion about schools, Public Agenda asked people how they thought various ideas "would improve kids' academic achievement." The results showed support for higher standards and stronger consequences for both academic performance and conduct.

Not allowing kids to graduate from high school unless they clearly demonstrate they can write and speak English well.	**88%**
Emphasizing such work habits as being on time, dependable, and disciplined.	**88%**
Setting up very clear guidelines on what kids should learn and teachers should teach in every major subject so the kids and the teachers will know what to aim for.	**82%**
Permanently removing from school grounds kids who are caught with drugs or with weapons.	**76%**
Taking persistent troublemakers out of class so that teachers can concentrate on the kids who want to learn.	**73%**
Raising the standards of promotion from grade school to junior high and only letting kids move ahead when they pass a test showing that have reached those standards.	**70%**

Percentage rating item 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale where 5 means it would improve academic achievement a great deal and 1 means it would not improve academic achievement at all.

Data: Public Agenda, 1994

EdSource 1998

The difference between content and performance standards

ATHLETIC ACTIVITIES PROVIDE A FAMILIAR EXAMPLE OF THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CONTENT AND PERFORMANCE STANDARDS. THE CONTENT STANDARD IS THAT ALL STUDENTS ARE REQUIRED TO RUN THE MILE. THE PERFORMANCE STANDARD IS *HOW QUICKLY* STUDENTS ARE EXPECTED TO RUN IT. THE LATTER MIGHT INCLUDE BOTH A MINIMUM EXPECTATION AND A WORLD-CLASS MARK THAT ALL STUDENTS COULD AIM FOR, WITH BENCHMARKS OR INTERIM GOALS IN BETWEEN.

What do we mean by standards?

In most areas of our lives, standards are second nature. Whether we consciously define them or not, we use our personal set of standards to decide what quality of products we purchase, what television shows we watch, and even how often we clean our houses. In the workplace, we perform tasks based on the standards of our company or organization. Often those standards are very clearly spelled out, and the consequence for not meeting them may be to lose your job.

For a variety of reasons, academic standards are often unclear, both to students and to the adults responsible for educating and raising them. In addition, the standards that do exist often vary from one school to another, and even from one teacher to another in the same school. Education reform efforts over the last 15 years have convinced many people that this lack of clear, agreed-upon standards must be addressed if overall student performance is to improve.

Education standards are typically broken into two categories:

- "Content standards," which describe what students should know and be able to do at each stage in their education; and
- "Performance standards," which describe how well students have progressed toward the content standards.

The move to create national standards

Many observers believe that the United States needs to develop national guidelines on what students need to know and be able to do, and how well. A variety of groups have been working on creating voluntary standards that would reflect some national consensus.

To that end, professional groups (math teachers, science teachers, reading teachers, civics teachers, etc.) have created national content standards in their respective disciplines. These efforts have met with varying degrees of acceptance.

New Standards — a national coalition that included about two dozen states (California among them) and several large school districts — worked for about five years to create performance standards based on these national content standards in English, math, science, and "applied learning." The latter, which requires students to use what they learn to solve problems that might occur in the workplace or home, is of special interest to the business community.

Setting statewide standards in California

Along with many other states, California is attempting to set more rigorous statewide standards for student performance. All but one state have "made the commitment to develop state standards in the academic disciplines," according to a 1997 report by the American Federation of Teachers. The work done on national standards is often used to inform the states' work, and it has been reviewed in California.

In 1995, California lawmakers passed a law requiring the development of voluntary statewide standards upon which to base a statewide testing system. The process called for an appointed 21-member Commission for the Establishment of Academic Content and Performance Standards to recommend rigorous standards for all major subject areas at every grade level of K-12 education.

As the first major step in the completion of that work, the Commission submitted Reading and Writing Content Standards and Mathematics Content Standards to the State Board of Education (SBE) in October 1997. The Commission then planned to begin work on content standards for science and history/geography.

In a separate effort, an independent statewide committee of K-12 and higher education representatives sponsored by the California Education Round Table (CERT) drafted recommended standards for high school graduation. These recommendations were released in January 1997 and presented to the state Commission. The CERT recommendations were reflected in the Commission's standards but were not adopted as exit requirements. The Commission's recommendations encompassed, but also exceeded, nearly all those proposed by CERT.

The SBE approved, with some changes, the reading and writing standards in November 1997 and the next month made more controversial changes in the math standards. Although adoption of the standards by school districts will be voluntary, the standards are intended to be used as the basis for a new statewide student testing program that will be mandatory for all local school districts.

Yet another set of statewide standards has an influence on the K-12 system: the entrance standards jointly adopted by the academic senates of the three public segments and the private sector of California's higher education system. These standards, aimed at informing both high school and college teachers, outline what students are expected to know and be able to do when they enter college.

Members of the California Education Round Table (CERT) include:

- THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION
- REPRESENTATIVES OF THE THREE PUBLIC SEGMENTS OF THE CALIFORNIA HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM:
  - THE CHANCELLOR OF THE CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES
  - THE CHANCELLOR OF CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITIES
  - THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
- THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE CALIFORNIA POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION COMMISSION
- A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE STATE'S PRIVATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES.

Experts Say

"STANDARDS BRING A NEW IDEA INTO AMERICAN EDUCATION. STRANGE AS IT MAY SEEM, THE AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM HAS NEVER BEFORE ARTICULATED WHAT IT EXPECTS OF ITS STUDENTS, EXCEPT IN TERMS OF BASIC REQUIREMENTS FOR MINIMUM COMPETENCY OR HIGH SCHOOL PROFICIENCY TESTS. UNTIL THIS POINT, WE HAVE NOT HELD CONVERSATIONS AT THE NATIONAL, STATE, OR LOCAL LEVELS ABOUT WHAT WE EXPECT OUR STUDENTS TO KNOW AND BE ABLE TO DO AT THEIR BEST."

RUTH MITCHELL
FRONT-END ALIGNMENT: USING STANDARDS TO STEER EDUCATIONAL CHANGE
THE EDUCATION TRUST

SAMPLE CALIFORNIA STANDARDS

The following are excerpts from the mathematics and writing content standards presented to the State Board of Education in October 1997 by the California Commission for the Establishment of Academic Content and Performance Standards.

MATHEMATICS — Number Sense

(For each standard there are more specific expectations as well as examples of tasks students could be expected to perform.)

First Grade: Students demonstrate the meaning of addition and subtraction and use these operations to solve problems.

Fifth Grade: Students understand very large and very small numbers, positive and negative numbers, and the relationship between decimals, fractions, and percents.

Eighth Grade: Students understand the real number system as a coherent set of elements, operations, and properties, and use real numbers in concrete and abstract situations.

11th/12th Grade: Students demonstrate understanding of and facility working with sequences, series, and matrices.

WRITING — Strategies/Organization and Focus

First Grade: [Students] select a focus when writing; use descriptive words.

Fifth Grade: [Students] establish a context and create a point of view; create multi-paragraph texts that present effective introductions and concluding paragraphs...; create a clear organizing structure ... and link paragraphs in ways that help the reader follow the line of thought.

Eighth Grade: [Students] establish a controlling impression, create a coherent thesis, or make a clear and knowledgeable judgment in writing; reinforce coherence within and across paragraphs ...; support thesis or judgments with techniques such as analogies, paraphrases,.quotes and opinions from authorities ...

11th/12th Grade: [Students] demonstrate understanding of the elements of discourse (purpose, speaker, audience, form) when completing ... writing assignments; use elements such as point of view, characterization, and irony ...; structure ideas and arguments in a sustained, persuasive, and sophisticated way ...; use a variety of rhetorical devices to enhance meaning ...; use language ... to create a specific tone.

EdSource 1998

Local districts also are taking initiative

Local districts will be encouraged to use the statewide standards as a framework to which they add detail. Setting local standards can help school districts ensure that they are meeting the unique needs of their student population.

In fact, local school districts are not necessarily waiting for the Commission and SBE to complete their work. Many have been working independently on their own standards. In addition, the California Department of Education (CDE) in 1995 initiated a "Challenge District" program (see the Teaching and Instruction section) that had the development of local academic standards as a centerpiece.

Standards are just the first step in a long process of improving schools. They serve to outline *what* students need to learn and *how well*. The next piece is determining *how* students will be taught, which includes choosing textbooks and deciding on teaching strategies. Crucial to the effort is deciding how to measure success in improving student performance.

DEBATES CONTINUE ON ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES

Since the early 1990s, California and local school districts have struggled with how to assess student performance in ways that are comparable from one student to another, reliable in measuring all students, and valid in terms of the data they provide. Part of the tension revolves around how the assessments will be used. In fact, tests and other assessments serve a variety of different purposes. These include:

- measuring individual student knowledge, skills, and progress in order to improve the instructional program for each child;
- measuring school, school district, and statewide performance for broad public accountability; and
- identifying students eligible for special programs.

While these are not mutually exclusive uses, each has a different goal in mind. With each goal come questions about the best type of measures or assessments to use and which students should be assessed. Most education observers also caution against relying too much on standardized tests — or any single measure for that matter — to judge the effectiveness of a school or the performance of a student. They say that using a variety of measures provides the most accurate picture.

Why we test students

Measuring individual student performance is done constantly by teachers in order to assess students' abilities and progress and give parents information about their child. Such measurements also can give teachers the information they need to improve their instructional programs in

Industry skill standards

IN A 1994 REPORT ENTITLED *MOBILIZING FOR COMPETITIVENESS*, THE CALIFORNIA BUSINESS ROUNDTABLE CALLED ON THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY AND STATE LEADERS TO DEVELOP A PROCESS FOR SETTING INDUSTRY-BY-INDUSTRY SKILL STANDARDS. THESE STANDARDS WOULD LET STUDENTS AND WORKERS KNOW WHAT THEY ARE EXPECTED TO LEARN IN ORDER TO QUALIFY FOR HIGH-WAGE JOBS NOW AND IN THE FUTURE.

THE REPORT RECOMMENDED THE CREATION OF INDUSTRY CONSORTIA TO SET THE SKILL STANDARDS AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A PANEL TO OVERSEE STANDARDS AND CERTIFICATION.

THIS WORK HAS GONE FORWARD IN MANY CALIFORNIA INDUSTRIES INDEPENDENTLY, INCLUDING TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND BANKING. TYPICALLY, STATEWIDE INDUSTRY ASSOCIATIONS DEVELOP THE STANDARDS. THEY MAY WORK WITH K-12 EDUCATORS, VOCATIONAL EDUCATION PROVIDERS, INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION, AND THE CDE. THESE EFFORTS ARE COORDINATED NATIONALLY BY THE NATIONAL SKILLS STANDARDS BOARD.

Experts Say

"WITHOUT STANDARDS TO DEFINE WHAT CHILDREN SHOULD LEARN AND HOW THEY SHOULD LEARN IT, WE ARE TRAVELING DOWN A ROAD WITHOUT A DESTINATION.

"WITHOUT ASSESSMENTS THAT REFLECT THOSE STANDARDS, STUDENTS, TEACHERS, AND THE PUBLIC HAVE NO WAY OF KNOWING HOW FAR THEY MUST GO TO REACH THEIR GOALS."

"QUALITY COUNTS"
EDUCATION WEEK

response to the needs of each student. Teacher-determined tests, teacher observations, parent conferences, report cards, portfolios of student work, and student exhibitions can be rich and accurate sources of information about an individual student's progress. However, the validity of such measures depends on the skills and standards of each teacher, and they are not readily comparable from teacher to teacher.

Assessments required by the state or school district attempt to give parents and educators a more objective measure of student performance. Assessments may compare students with each other or against district-established performance standards, or both. But measuring individual students' performance is not the only purpose of assessment.

Measuring school site and school district performance is also an important reason for doing assessments. When all students are assessed the same way, collective results can be analyzed more readily. This can be one gauge of the effectiveness of an educational program. School districts can use such results to help evaluate teachers and schools. Community members can look to them to evaluate how well individual schools and the whole school district are doing. If the test is given to students throughout the state, it can provide some information about how one district compares with another.

Identifying students eligible for special programs is another reason that school districts use assessments. Many special programs that are separately funded by the state or federal government require this testing. One example is the tests given to identify students eligible for participation in California's Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) program. Several tests are also available to help districts determine a student's eligibility for various Special Education services. Districts also test all their students — through a limited choice of approved instruments such as CTBS or ITBS (the California and Iowa Tests of Basic Skills) — to determine the number who need special assistance under federal programs such as Title I. Schools may use these assessments for other purposes as well.

Types of assessments

The field of student assessment has undergone considerable change over the last decade. Schools have a choice of many types of measures or tests, each of which has strengths and weaknesses. Those assessments fall into two basic categories.

Standardized assessments are usually nationally-developed, mass-produced, machine-scored tests designed to measure the general or basic skills and knowledge students are expected to learn. This is traditionally a timed exercise that happens once a year, often only at certain grade levels. These multiple-choice tests are relatively inexpensive to administer. Common standardized tests include the CTBS and ITBS.

Performance-based/applied skills assessments require the student to generate information or complete a task. They may include writing short responses to questions, developing solutions to complicated mathematical problems, writing an extended essay, or conducting an experiment. Many see these assessments as more appropriate measures of the capabilities students will need in a complex society. They are generally more difficult to develop and score, and they take longer for students to complete. It is also more difficult to aggregate the data to create a common portrait of student progress in a school, district, or state.

Most experts on assessment believe that both standardized and performance-based assessments are necessary to give an accurate and meaningful picture of student performance.

Another difference in assessments is how the results are reported. Results can be referenced against two different types of measures, called norms and criteria. When a test is norm-referenced, it means the score evaluates students against the performance of their peers, so a 50th percentile score means half of the students who took the test scored higher. Criterion-referenced tests are an evaluation of student performance based on an identified set of expectations or performance standards. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), for example, used a four-part scale to identify whether students' reading performance was "advanced, proficient, basic, or below basic" for their grades.

Definitions

FOR THE PURPOSES OF THIS SECTION, THE TERM **ASSESSMENTS** REFERS TO ANY FORMAL MEASURE OR TEST OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE USED BY A SCHOOL DISTRICT OR THE STATE TO LOOK AT THE INDIVIDUAL OR COLLECTIVE PROGRESS OF MANY STUDENTS OVER TIME.

Californians wait for a new statewide assessment

Currently, Californians have few ways to evaluate and compare the overall quality of their public schools on the basis of student performance. The last statewide standardized achievement test was conducted during the 1994-95 school year. In 1995-96, California was one of only seven states that did not administer a statewide assessment of student performance (see box, next page).

Meanwhile, from 1995 to 1997, about half of California's school districts participated in voluntary basic skills testing by administering one of more than 60 state-approved tests. These included an array of nationally standardized tests such as ITBS and the California Achievement Test (CAT). The results of these tests provided some districtwide and school-by-school comparisons in individual communities. But comparisons between districts were difficult because so many different tests were used.

In the fall of 1997 the California Legislature and Governor agreed to change the voluntary basic skills testing. This decision was based on the public and policymakers' desire to measure the impact of class-size reduction, the literacy program, and other major school improvement initiatives. They voted to provide some funding and *require* school dis-

THE DEMISE OF CALIFORNIA'S STATE TESTING SYSTEM

As California moves toward developing a new state testing system, anxieties will doubtless run high among those charged with the task and those who must approve the system. Memories of controversies in 1994 overshadow three decades in which California operated a state testing system with relatively few problems.

The first mandated state tests of student achievement were administered in 1961 through the California Assessment Program (CAP). The program was routinely expanded and refined until 1991. That year, Governor Wilson signed legislation creating the California Learning Assessment System (CLAS), an ambitious effort to develop a new kind of testing system to meet changing expectations and for the first time also provide individual scores. The legislation called for the test to be developed over five years.

In 1993, after two years of development, CLAS was administered to virtually all California students in grades four, eight, and 10, in reading, writing, and mathematics. The scores were reported in the spring of 1994. Controversy centered on the content of the reading assessments themselves and the reliability of the sampling and scoring process in all subject areas. The reactions and subsequent debates were emotional and sometimes acrimonious. Governor Wilson subsequently vetoed CLAS re-authorization and funding.

In October 1995, the Governor signed into law the California Assessment of Academic Achievement Act, authorizing the development of a new statewide student testing system. Its purposes include establishing rigorous academic and performance standards for shaping a statewide assessment and determining how well California's schools and individual students are meeting those standards as demonstrated by the assessment. It is expected that it will take at least until the spring of 1999 to complete the process and begin administering a new, standards-based statewide assessment.

MIXED RESULTS FROM THE FEW AVAILABLE MEASURES OF STATEWIDE STUDENT PERFORMANCE

The limited statewide measures available present a mixed picture of student performance in California. And several of these measures are either quite dated or limited in the information they provide about all students or all schools.

THE BAD NEWS

- California fourth graders performed near the bottom in reading on the most recent (1994) test administered by the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP). Only 18% of our fourth graders were rated as proficient or advanced compared with 28% nationally.
- Only 17% of California eighth graders who took the NAEP math exam in 1996 performed at a proficient or advanced level, compared with 23% in the U.S. as a whole. Fourth graders fared even worse, with just 11% scoring at that level compared with 20% nationally.
- In 1993, more than one-third of all freshmen entering California State University through the regular admissions process (rather than with advanced placements) needed remediation in math, English, or both.

THE GOOD NEWS

- More students, 35% in 1995, are taking the high school courses needed to qualify for admission into a four-year college, and more are taking college entrance exams.
- The performance of juniors and seniors taking Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate exams has improved, with 12 of 100 scores high enough to qualify for college credit in 1995-96, compared with six of 100 in 1987-88.
- More California students, including African-American and Hispanic students, are taking the SAT college entrance examinations, and scores are rising overall.
- The four-year high school completion rate — an estimate of the likelihood that a ninth grade student will stay in school through 12th grade — was 83% in 1994-95, up 2% in two years.
- About 60% of 1994-95 high school graduates entered a college program (two-year or four-year) in the fall of 1995.

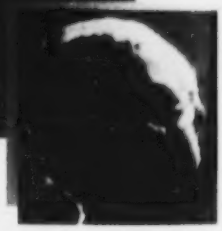
The official information on student success after leaving secondary school is almost completely focused on student admissions into colleges and universities. Neither schools nor the state routinely keep statistics on students who attend trade schools or take jobs immediately after high school, or on what proportion of students who enter college go on to earn a degree.

EdSource 1998

Experts Say

"DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP AND PRODUCTIVE ADULTHOOD BEGIN WITH STANDARDS OF CONDUCT AND STANDARDS FOR ACHIEVEMENT IN OUR SCHOOLS. OTHER EDUCATION REFORMS MAY WORK; HIGH STANDARDS OF CONDUCT AND ACHIEVEMENT ***DO*** WORK — AND NOTHING ELSE ***CAN*** WORK WITHOUT THEM."

"A BILL OF RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR LEARNING"
AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS



tricts to administer a single state-selected basic skills test to all students in grades 2-11. Among the more controversial aspects of this decision was the question of whether students who do not speak English would be required to take the test in English. It was decided that all students must be tested in English, but that those in their first year in a California school also would be tested in their primary language if a translation was available. In subsequent years, a district could continue to test the student in his or her primary language at its discretion and expense. As required by law, a second applied skills student assessment based on the new academic standards will also eventually be adopted.

SCHOOL ORDER AFFECTS STUDENT PERFORMANCE

When student performance is under discussion, the first subject is typically academics. But very quickly the conversation shifts to public and educator concerns about order in schools and student behavior. Many people believe that academic performance cannot be improved unless these issues also are addressed.

In recent years, California educators and policymakers have put new emphasis on developing and enforcing standards for student behavior and on improving school environments to reduce violence and increase order. Success in this area will affect both the students who create problems and those whose learning suffers when they're forced to be in classrooms where disruptive behavior takes place. Recently, the state has taken several actions.

- In response to safety problems related to gang attire, state law now allows school districts to set policies encouraging students to wear school uniforms. Long Beach Unified School District pioneered this approach, and its success has been well-documented.
- In February 1997, the California Department of Education initiated a new annual school safety report that tells communities about the number of expulsions and crimes committed in their local schools, including vandalism and drug and alcohol offenses.
- State "zero tolerance" laws attempt to ensure swift and consistent consequences for certain types of behavior (see sidebar).
- State law now requires school districts to make sure expelled students are placed in appropriate alternative educational settings.

In the area of school safety, schools depend heavily on the cooperation of parents and the larger community. In some communities, police departments and schools have established partnerships to address youth crime. Working together, parents and schools can give students consistent messages about acceptable school behavior on issues ranging from attire to truancy. When schools find themselves alone in enforcing rules that parents or the larger community aren't aware of or don't support, they have much less chance of maintaining safe, orderly school environments.

CALIFORNIA LAWS REGARDING STUDENT BEHAVIOR

By law, schools in California are required to expel students who have:

- Possessed, sold, or furnished a firearm.
- Brandished a knife at another person.
- Sold a controlled substance.
- Committed or attempted to commit sexual assault or sexual battery.

Upon finding that a student presents a continuing danger to other students, or that other means of correction have failed or are not feasible, schools in California shall expel students who have:

- Caused serious physical injury to another person (except in self-defense).
- Possessed any knife, explosive, or other dangerous object.
- Unlawfully possessed any controlled substance (except the first offense for possession of less than an ounce of marijuana).
- Committed robbery or extortion.

These lists cover incidents that occur on school grounds, going to and from school, during lunch, and at school-sponsored activities. Schools have the discretion to suspend or expel students for various other offenses, as long as the students' actions are related to school attendance or school activities.

Upon expelling a student, a school district must refer the student to an alternative program of study appropriate for students with discipline problems and not located at a regular school site. In situations where such a program is not available, schools and county offices of education may be granted limited exceptions to this provision.

Even in cases of mandatory expulsion, school boards have the right to suspend the expulsion or shorten its duration. The maximum time a student can be expelled is two semesters (not counting summer school).

EdSource 1998

The Law Says

California public schools must provide ***written notice of school rules*** *and discipline procedures* to students and parents at the beginning of each school year, or at the time a student enrolls in a new school. These rules and procedures need to be reviewed and adopted every four years by a group composed of parents, teachers, school administrators, and security personnel if applicable, plus students in junior high and high schools.

School principals are required to report *certain student behaviors to local law enforcement officials.* These include assault with a deadly weapon or by force likely to produce great bodily injury, and possession, use, sale, or being under the influence of any controlled substance, alcoholic beverage, or intoxicant. Principals must also report any student attacking, assaulting, or menacing any school employee.

Summarized from California Education Code

SUES AND TRENDS

ALIGNING NATIONAL, STATE, AND LOCAL STANDARDS

Who should decide what students need to know and be able to do? In education circles and among policymakers throughout the United States, this question is being debated — at times heatedly. The Educational Excellence Network, a conservative education think tank, characterized it as "perhaps the stickiest question in the domain of standards."

Numerous polls show that the majority of Americans believe we should have national standards and tests, which are common in most other industrialized countries. After all, they reason, 5 x 5 = 25 everywhere. But far fewer people want the U.S. government to develop or administer "federal" standards and tests.

Many contend that state governments have the responsibility of articulating and enforcing both content and performance standards. Still others say ultimate authority should reside in the nation's local school districts. Indeed, because our education system was founded on the philosophy of local control, many states have encountered both political and legal challenges to their right to enforce state standards. At the same time, high family mobility creates the need for some continuity from school to school and district to district.

Within California, additional concerns about alignment exist. If new statewide K-12 academic standards are adopted, how closely will the high school standards align with college entrance expectations? And what about industry skill standards? How will the K-12 standards affect existing requirements, such as the Golden State examinations and local graduation requirements? What can be done to ensure that schools, students, and parents don't find themselves grappling with conflicting expectations? These important policy issues are being addressed as the development of California's new K-12 academic standards moves forward. The answers to them will evolve over time and with experience.

Ultimately, the question is whether California as a state can create a cohesive set of standards that will have a positive impact on student performance. Central to that will be the creation of a statewide assessment that aligns with the standards and measures progress against them.

Experts Say

"Some people suggest that in a mobile society, what we really need are national standards. They argue that math should not mean something different in Arkansas than in Alaska. To others, even voluntary national standards raise the unthinkable specter of a national curriculum. We are not likely to settle this debate soon. The result is likely to be a patchwork of standards that vary from state to state — and even from district to district."

"Quality Counts"
Education Week

AGREEING ON EXPECTATIONS IS VITAL

Throughout their school careers, and on into adulthood, students naturally find themselves trying to measure up to the expectations of not only teachers, but also their parents. Indeed, parental expectations for high levels of performance can be a major factor in students' success. By the same token, low expectations can become self-fulfilling prophecies.

A major dilemma emerges for schools when parents either don't agree with or don't understand what the school is trying to accomplish. Research shows that parents often rely on simple measures of their children's progress, such as accurate spelling and memorization of multiplication tables. This often frustrates educators who believe more complex, performance-based assessments should be the focus.

Experts find it is common for people to disagree about what schools ought to be teaching and what students ought to be learning. The very process of setting standards can help schools, parents, and students forge a mutual understanding of expectations. Setting standards forces those who participate — ideally, teachers, administrators, parents, and community members — to wrestle together with some fundamental issues and difficult choices, and to clarify the community's values.

Advocates of the standards process say it can be the "organizing principle behind a restructured education system." The process is powerful because it represents a very public and explicit statement of what the community believes should happen in its schools. These shared community expectations, in turn, can be used to begin holding schools and students accountable for results.

HOW WILL WE ENFORCE STANDARDS ONCE WE HAVE THEM?

Many difficult issues are likely to emerge if schools begin holding students accountable for their performance. For example, the stakes become very high when a student who fails to meet rigorous standards is denied a high school diploma. Yet such a consequence could be a natural outcome of a standards-based system.

Experts Say

"Different students will emerge from school knowing different things as well as different amounts of the same things. But, we could ask, can we be equitable and excellent at the same time? ... Historically, we have not been good at saying that people are different but not unequal. To say that two outcomes are different, historically, implied that one of them is inferior."

Gerald W. Bracey
Final Exam: A Study of the Perpetual Scrutiny of American Education

What are the public, schools, policymakers, and state prepared to do to ensure that all students have an opportunity to meet the standards — that is, that they have adequate facilities, necessary books and materials, and good teachers? Are we prepared to provide special recognition and incentives for students who perform unusually well? And what about those students who simply cannot pass the tests?

Public Agenda, a nonpartisan, nonprofit research organization, identified this last question as an issue of particular concern for classroom teachers. While teachers know that the public supports the idea of higher standards, they wonder how parents will react when it is their child who doesn't graduate, is held back, or is otherwise held accountable for substandard achievement.

The heat on this issue could rise significantly if adults — teachers, administrators, and school board members — are held accountable for student performance. Should school funding be based on student performance? How about individual salaries?

These issues of equity, excellence, and accountability need to be addressed if standards are to go from words on paper to making a real difference in how schools operate.

WHAT TYPES OF ASSESSMENT ARE BEST?

When California became embroiled in controversy in the mid-1990s over its state assessment system — the CLAS test — it was debating questions that have confounded experts in educational testing for decades (or perhaps since the beginning of formal education). If schools always teach what they are required to test, do we have a test worth teaching to? Can we use a state-level test to improve classroom instruction? Can any test really provide an accurate measure of what students know and are able to do? What other measures of student achievement can and should be used to assess individual student performance? Are they different from the measures we need to determine the effectiveness of individual schools and school districts, or the state education system as a whole?

The competing needs and demands implied in these questions lead most experts to the same conclusion. No single test can provide all the

information that is needed about student and school performance. At the same time, most people agree that a statewide assessment is important for many reasons. It can help policymakers make comparisons, identify trends, and make sure students as a whole have acquired basic competencies. It also can allow them to evaluate the effects of improvement measures such as class-size reduction. School districts can use the same results to evaluate progress by school or by classroom, look at achievement of various groups of students, and improve instruction accordingly. Parents can use a state test as one measure of their own children's progress.

As it moves to once again implement a statewide testing system, California will continue to struggle with the question of what combinations of tests can give us the most valuable information about student performance.

A related question is whether the results of standardized tests reflect students' real abilities. One concern is the validity of any test given to the youngest students. Another is that many students — seeing no personal reward or punishment linked to their performance — make no effort to do well. How serious is this problem? Can we determine how much it skews standardized test results? And what can be done about it?

HOW DO STUDENT ATTITUDES AFFECT PERFORMANCE?

Students themselves are an often-ignored variable in the student-performance equation. Research and common sense indicate that students' attitudes and behavior can significantly influence academic performance.

"Teenagers themselves support the nationwide call for higher standards," discovered Public Agenda when it surveyed high school students nationwide in 1997. On the survey and in focus groups, most students said they don't put as much work into their studies as they could, that they can get good or adequate grades without much effort, and that higher standards would make them work harder.

Interestingly, the Public Agenda work also illuminated students' worries about a "rough and tumble" teen culture they themselves see as destructive. Their top concerns about the schools they attend are cheating, teen obsessions with dress, and disruptive students.

Students Say

"Most teenagers believe that 'getting an education' is important to their lives. Contrary to popular belief, they would like to do well in school, and youngsters across the board — white, African-American, and Hispanic — say they admire, rather than look down on, classmates who make good grades. Like most adults, they express some skepticism about people who are 'highly educated,' but they clearly recognize the value society places on a college degree. Most say they plan to continue their education beyond high school; few see any alternative path to an acceptable future."

Getting By: What American Teenagers Really Think About Their Schools
Public Agenda

Students Say

"FOR MOST STUDENTS, GRADES ARE THE PRIMARY MEANS OF DETERMINING WHETHER THEY HAVE MET THE PREVAILING STANDARDS. STUDENTS ROUTINELY ADMIT — SOME WITH BRAVADO AND SOME WITH CHAGRIN — THAT THEY CALIBRATE THEIR EFFORTS, OFTEN METICULOUSLY, TO DO ONLY AS MUCH AS IT TAKES TO GET THE GRADE THEY CAN LIVE WITH."

GETTING BY: WHAT AMERICAN TEENAGERS REALLY THINK ABOUT THEIR SCHOOLS
PUBLIC AGENDA

The latter points echo some of the themes of a 1996 book by Laurence Steinberg, *Beyond the Classroom: Why School Reform Has Failed and What Parents Need to Do.* This somewhat controversial work focused on the impact of student culture on attitudes about academic achievement. A major finding was that current student culture in high schools is either actively negative or at best apathetic about high academic achievement. About 20% of students said they don't try as hard as they could in school because they worry about what their friends would think.

Many experts also argue that until more businesses, colleges, and universities send consistent messages to students that their work in school really counts, most students will continue to slack off. Students not trying to compete for the 50 or so elite universities in the country often believe that their schoolwork hardly matters: employers rarely look at students' secondary school records, and community colleges have a policy of accepting all applicants. Many colleges have rather low admissions standards in regard to performance on high school work.

By the time students reach high school, they must shoulder most of the responsibility for their own school success. However, teachers can help make sure schoolwork is meaningful and make it clear why school is relevant to students' futures. Parents can influence student motivation by showing support for schoolwork and helping their children identify strengths and talents. Researchers and policymakers also can continue to learn more about how the larger culture and peer groups affect student attitudes toward school and what can be done by adults to intervene when those influences are negative.

WAYS TO GET INVOLVED

ACTIONS TO TAKE

Learn about the standards-development process and the standards being adopted

In your school district: Has your school district set academic standards, or is it currently involved in the process? If so, ask your school principal or school district superintendent what has been done. Read over your district's standards. Find out who is involved in the development process and how the district plans to share the standards with everyone in the school community, including parents and students.

Is your district waiting to see the state's recommendations? Let school district officials and board members know if you think academic standards are important and would like to see your district involved in the process. Volunteer to serve on a standards-setting advisory committee.

In California: Whether you are a teacher, administrator, parent, or community/business person, you should learn about the student standards being developed now at the state level. Write the Commission for the Establishment of Academic Content and Performance Standards to get information about the work it has done so far and to express your opinion.

In the United States: Becoming familiar with the work done on national standards can give you a broader context for looking at what's happening locally. Whether you support the concept of national standards or not, looking at the New Standards project will be informative.

Find out about different assessments and how they're used

In the classroom and your local school: If you are a parent, ask school officials for an interpretation of your child's standardized test scores when you receive them. Ask your child's teachers how they will use recent test information to improve your child's academic performance. Ask your school administrator how he or she plans to use the results from student testing to improve the teaching at your school. If you are a teacher, consider whether professional development can help you address areas of student performance that appear to be weak. If you are an administrator, expect your teachers to demonstrate that their students are progressing and meeting expectations, and help them develop improvement strategies.

> *"If we* **expect more** *from students, they'll* **achieve more."**
>
> *"Kids today are under too much* **pressure** *already."*

"*My son has to* **memorize** *his multiplication tables.*"

"*I want to know that my daughter* **understands** *how to solve* **complex problems.**"

In your school district: Learn more about the various kinds of standardized tests used in your school district. Ask to see districtwide or schoolwide test results, and ask for any available information about how your district compares with other districts which use them. How does your school compare with other schools in the district? Are the tests measuring what you think is important? How are both the tests and test results affecting classroom instruction? Are the tests adequately explained to the parent and teaching community?

In California: Stay informed about the state's progress toward developing and adopting a new standards-based statewide student testing system.

Be aware of and participate in setting standards for student behavior

In your school district: Review standards for student behavior. Acceptable student behavior is related to improved academic performance, but enforcing student behavior standards at school takes time and leadership. School board members, administrators, and teachers should involve parents in establishing clear expectations and consequences and should expect parents to support them when enforcement becomes necessary.

Equally important is sending students the message that the adults in their lives are in general agreement about certain behaviors. And what if schools and parents disagree? Rather than avoiding the conflict and sending students mixed signals, try having community forums on these tough issues. Parents can take the lead in discussing and working toward community consensus on some standards for behavior like swearing, alcohol use, or cheating on tests. Start with the easier problems and enjoy some success before tackling the really divisive issues. Parent-teacher organizations are a natural forum for such discussions.

In your community: If issues of school safety are a concern in your community, school officials probably need the support of city and county governments. Cooperative relationships with local police agencies and juvenile court systems ensure consistent responses, sending a strong message to young people about acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Community-based projects that provide safe places and constructive, youth-centered activities can reduce crime, improve living conditions, and make a big difference in young people's lives. Parents and other community members can help by putting pressure on other local officials to cooperate with schools on everything from truancy to after-school activities to vandalism.

Start asking questions about student motivation

In your home: Student motivation is a more subtle problem that frustrates both teachers and parents. Visits to college campuses or work places can help students develop a "vision" of their own futures. And it may help them see why school is important.

In your school: If motivation is a significant problem at your school, consider convening a parent/school meeting to discuss its extent, its multiple causes, and the actions that administrators, teachers, and parents can take to improve the desire of students to do well in school. Do certain students need more one-on-one attention or special programs? Should the curriculum be more relevant to the real world? What do the students think about what they're learning? Invite expert speakers to help address issues and identify solutions.

"If schools won't maintain **order,** *how do they expect students to* **learn?"**

"Schools can't teach **respect** *when our society doesn't."*

WHERE TO GO FOR ANSWERS

Teachers can explain what assessments reveal about an individual student's strengths and weaknesses and propose strategies for helping a student improve.

School principals can explain the use and results of assessments at the school level and describe school standards for student performance and behavior. They can also spell out the consequences for students who do not meet those standards.

District office personnel can describe the district's existing expectations for student achievement, assessment strategies, and policies on student discipline.

School board members make the policy decisions about these issues.

Parent-led school organizations can facilitate communication with schools about parent expectations or concerns about academic performance and student behavior.

Community-based organizations can do the same between schools and the larger community.

Students in the middle grades and high school can often explain articulately the "student culture" around academic achievement and behavior.

The State Board of Education will hold public hearings as it adopts new content and performance standards and new statewide assessments of student progress.

IF YOU'RE WONDERING

What subjects should schools teach?
— turn to Curriculum, Section B.

How can we make sure schools and teachers have the capacity to meet the new standards?
— turn to Teaching and Instruction, Section D.

How does adequate funding relate to student performance?
— turn to School Funding, Section E.

Who can and should be held responsible for meeting the standards?
— turn to The System, Section F.

How can the community help schools address issues of order and discipline?
— turn to Shared Responsibility, Section G.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ...

Standards Recommendations

Commission for the Establishment of Academic Content and Performance Standards

This commission was established by California legislation to recommend rigorous academic standards for all major subject areas at every grade level of California K-12 education. Until June 1999:

801 K Street, Suite 912
Sacramento, CA 95814
916/323-8013
www.ca.gov/goldstandards/

New Standards

These national performance standards in English, math, science, and "applied learning" were developed by a coalition of about two dozen states and several large school districts.

National Center on Education and the Economy
700 11th Street, NW
Suite 750
Washington, DC 20001
202/783-3668
fax: 202/783-3672
www.ncee.org

Challenge

This pamphlet provides a summary of the elements that make up California's Challenge School District reform initiative. 1996

California Department of Education
P.O. Box 944272
Sacramento, CA 94244-2720
www.cde.ca.gov

Measures of Student Performance

High School Performance Report

Published annually in late spring by the California Department of Education, this comprehensive database provides updated information about the performance of California's high schools on a variety of measures. For a summary:

CDE Education Planning and Information Center
916/657-2273
For school and district level results: www.cde.ca.gov

Student Behavior Issues

Beyond the Classroom: Why School Reform Has Failed and What Parents Need to Do
Laurence Steinberg, Bradford Brown, and Sanford M. Dornbusch

Based on three years of surveys and interviews of high school students and their parents, the authors assert that the adolescent peer culture of America does not support academic success. Simon & Schuster, 1996

Getting By: What American Teenagers Really Think About Their Schools
Public Agenda

See Curriculum section.

Handbook on the Rights and Responsibilities of School Personnel and Students

Adopted by the California State Board of Education and published by the California Department of Education, this handbook discusses providing moral, civic, and ethical education; teaching about religion; promoting responsible attitudes and behaviors; and preventing and responding to hate violence.

California Department of Education
Bureau of Publications, Sales Unit
P.O. Box 271
Sacramento, CA 95812-0271
916/445-1260
fax: 916/323-0823

Hostile Hallways: The AAUW Survey on Sexual Harassment in America's Schools

This in-depth, national survey of students in grades 8 to 11 profiles the widespread problem of adolescent sexual harassment in schools and identifies the educational, emotional, and behavioral impact on students. 1993

American Association of University Women Educational Foundation
Sales Office
P.O. Box 251
Annapolis Junction, MD 20701-0251
800/225-9998, ext. 246

General References

A Business Leader's Guide to Setting Academic Standards

This guide was created to help business leaders get involved in setting high academic standards. It contains explanations of important terms and debate, examples of standards from across the nation, mini-case studies, and a listing of resources. 1996

The Business Roundtable
1615 L Street, NW, Suite 1100
Washington, DC 20036
202/872-1260
fax: 202/466-3509

Final Exam: A Study of the Perpetual Scrutiny of American Education
Gerald W. Bracey

Looking at educational reform from a historical perspective, the author provides a rich context for understanding the recent focus on assessment, standards, and outcomes in U.S. public schools. Technos Press of the Agency for Instructional Technology, 1995

Front-End Alignment: Using Standards to Steer Educational Change
Ruth Mitchell

This manual provides a framework for developing standards as a vehicle for rethinking education, focusing on academic and performance standards, as well as necessary conditions of learning. The Education Trust, 1996

American Association for Higher Education
Publications Orders Desk
One Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 360
Washington, DC 20036-1110
202/293-6440, ext. 11
fax: 202/293-0073

Improving Education through Standards-Based Reform
Milbrey W. McLaughlin and Lorrie A. Shepard with Jennifer O'Day

This report defines key issues in the standards movement and makes recommendations about how people involved in implementing such reforms can proceed in equitable and informed ways.

National Academy of Education
Stanford University
CERAS Building, Room 108
Stanford, CA 94305-3084
650/725-1003

Standards Mean Business
Nelson Smith

Reflecting a business perspective, this discussion paper explains the costs to society of a "minimum competency" approach and the need to develop a vision of high academic achievement for all students. National Alliance of Business, 1996

Raising the Standard
Denis P. Doyle and Susan Pimentel

This action guide describes the process and content of standards-driven reform.

Coalition for Goals 2000
School of Education and Human Development
The George Washington University
Washington, DC 20052
202/835-2000
fax: 202/659-4494
e-mail: connect@goalline.org

NOTES ... QUESTIONS ... IDEAS ...

Teaching and Instruction

MAKING SURE SCHOOLS AND EDUCATORS CAN MEET RISING EXPECTATIONS

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ABOUT THIS SECTION

FOCAL POINTS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Examining how effectively schools currently use time and group students to maximize achievement.
- Matching the organization of instruction and the instructional approach to the needs of its students.
- Encouraging the use of multiple instructional styles and strategies.
- Supporting the [illegible] of the teaching profession in California.
- Developing supportive and administrative skills as instructional leaders.
- Strengthening support systems (nurses, counselors, librarians, etc.) to help individual students without compromising instructional time.

Instructional issues are at the very heart of the learning experience for students. Instruction is not about what students are taught so much as how they are taught. Major issues include how students are grouped; how much instructional time is available and how it is organized; and what specific techniques teachers use to help students learn.

Instructional decisions can have a significant impact on student learning and on the quality of the fit between any individual student and teacher. The best way to teach or group students — or to structure class time — varies with the students, the teachers, and the particular school community involved. In recognition of this, local schools often have more flexibility in making these decisions than they might have in other areas, such as curriculum or testing. Consequently, the pros and cons of various instructional strategies are often the issues most debated in local schools — between parents and educators, among teachers, and between teachers and administrators.

Regardless of the strategies adopted, the classroom teacher is central to making them work for students. A teacher must be able to create, use, and evaluate effective teaching methods, and that depends on having the right preparation, professional development, and working conditions. As public and workplace demands for more highly skilled graduates increase, so does the pressure for teachers to perform at higher levels. Also crucial, although perhaps less widely understood, is the need for strong instructional leadership by school administrators. School principals and school district leaders must collaborate with their staffs to articulate an educational vision and to set and maintain professional standards in a school or district.

South Lake Tahoe

IN CALIFORNIA TODAY

A LOOK AT SCHOOL STRUCTURES AND CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION

In the United States, our system of public education includes some very strong traditions and assumptions about how schools are organized. Adults in our society — particularly those who haven't been in a school recently — probably share similar images of what school is like:

- School starts in September and ends in June.
- In elementary schools, one teacher handles all the subjects. After sixth grade, teachers specialize and students move from class to class.
- Children are divided by age and probably by ability as well. The students in each classroom are more "alike" than different.
- Students' primary responsibilities are to listen to the teacher, follow directions, and complete the work they're given.

Adults familiar with schools in California today know that many of these traditions are either being questioned or changed. This often occurs as part of a larger, more encompassing school improvement effort.

Such efforts sometimes meet with tremendous opposition that can come as a surprise to the would-be reformers, although it probably shouldn't. After all, how students are grouped, how the school day and year are organized, and how students are taught affect students, teachers, and parents both directly and personally.

How students are grouped

Many issues about school structure revolve around the question of which students — and how many of them — should be grouped together in a classroom and in a school.

Research and debates abound regarding the optimum size for schools and classrooms. The conventional wisdom is that smaller is better. In California — with its rapid student growth and consequent shortage of school facilities — school districts grapple with many costs and trade-offs when they attempt to reduce the number of children in a school or class. The 1996 passage of the state's K-3 class-size reduction program made many of these trade-offs clearer.

Experts Say

OVER LONG PERIODS OF TIME, SCHOOLS HAVE REMAINED BASICALLY SIMILAR IN THEIR CORE OPERATION, SO MUCH SO THAT THESE REGULARITIES HAVE IMPRINTED THEMSELVES ON STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, AND THE PUBLIC AS THE ESSENTIAL FEATURES OF A "REAL SCHOOL." RESISTANCE TO CHANGE IS SOMETIMES DISMISSED AS THE RESULT OF POPULAR IGNORANCE OR INSTITUTIONAL INERTIA, BUT THAT OVERSIMPLIFIES. OFTEN TEACHERS HAVE HAD WELL-FOUNDED REASONS FOR RESISTING CHANGE, AS HAVE PARENTS."

DAVID TYACK AND LARRY CUBAN
TINKERING TOWARD UTOPIA: A CENTURY OF PUBLIC SCHOOL REFORM

More divisive than the question of school and class size is the issue of which students should be taught together. Schools organize their classrooms by "sorting" children in myriad ways. The most common is by age: children who turn five the same year (up to December 1) all start kindergarten and proceed through each grade together.

Other "sorting" mechanisms historically have included student ability, students with disabilities, and students with special needs such as English language learners. By high school, students may begin sorting themselves based on their interests, their post-graduation goals, their family background, or their school achievement thus far.

Mixed-ability classrooms, multi-age classes, Advanced Placement classes, bilingual classes, mainstreamed Special Education students, desegregated schools, Afro-centric schools, science magnet schools, and single-gender schools are all examples of ways to group students. All of these grouping strategies are designed to achieve either a social or an educational goal. Each strategy has advantages and disadvantages, and because each can benefit some children more than others, or some goals at the expense of others, all can raise controversy in a school community.

Grouping decisions typically are made at either the school or district level, although some — particularly those related to students with special needs — are made in response to state and federal law, and to court decisions.

CALIFORNIA COMMITS TO REDUCING CLASS SIZE

For over a decade, California public schools have had the largest class sizes in the U.S. In 1996 state leaders decided to invest nearly $1 billion of the state's education funding into reducing class size to 20 students in grades K-3. Average class size in the state was estimated at about 29 students, but it varied considerably by school district.

In attempting to implement this program and receive the incentive funding offered by the state, many school districts throughout California faced a critical lack of classroom space and a shortage of credentialed teachers. In some cases, they also found themselves trading off other program priorities and the needs of older students in order to fully finance the costs of reducing class size.

Even so, the reaction among teachers and parents of K-3 students has been high enthusiasm for smaller classes. State leaders followed suit, allocating even more funds for the 1997-98 school year.

EdSource 1998

How school time is organized

The way that time is used and organized in schools has been a subject of great debate within education circles. A 1994 report called on educators to "restructure the use of time" in their schools (see sidebar). Such reform suggestions get translated into a variety of recommendations to change school schedules and operations.

One recommendation calls for more instructional time for students. The most straightforward suggestion is to increase the time students spend at school by lengthening the school day or year. Both are expensive propositions because they require additional compensation for the time added to the work year of teachers and other school staff.

Others say all that's needed is for schools to make better use of the time they have. For example, they recommend schools spend more time on core academic curriculum.

Particularly at middle and high schools, questions abound regarding how to divide up the school day. Many reformers stress the need to organize schools around learning instead of time, letting course content and objectives determine the schedule instead of allowing the schedule to determine what is taught. Reform ideas that come out of this include block scheduling, flexible scheduling, and things like "A" and "B" days that provide longer periods for core subjects.

Year-round education and other modified calendars are an attempt to look differently at the organization of the school year. While year-round is often proposed as a way to increase the use of school facilities (see the School Funding section), some also see it as a better way to organize instruction. They cite advantages like eliminating the "learning loss" that occurs when students have three consecutive summer months away from school and reducing burnout for teachers and students because the school year is broken into shorter segments. Another commonly cited advantage is schools' ability to use the shorter interim periods between regular school sessions to help students having trouble or to offer extra challenges to high-achieving students.

Rethinking the use of time in schools

In a 1994 publication, *Prisoners of Time*, the National Education Commission on Time and Learning stressed the need to restructure the use of time in schools. The report recommends that school districts:

- Reinvent schools around learning, not time. This means changing the focus from "How much time is enough?" to "What are we trying to accomplish?"
- Use student time in new and better ways. Education must be redesigned so that time becomes a factor supporting learning, not a boundary marking its limits.
- Provide additional academic time by reclaiming the school day for academic instruction. Students must receive at least 5.5 hours of core academic instructional time daily.
- Keep schools open longer to meet the needs of children and communities.
- Give teachers the professional time and opportunities they need to do their jobs.
- Invest in technology. Schools must seize the promise of new technologies to increase productivity, enhance student achievement, and expand learning time.

Summary of recommendations, *Preparing Students for the 21st Century*, American Association of School Administrators

The Law Says

Minimum time requirements and incentives for longer school days and years.

California law sets out minimum requirements for the length of the school day and the number of days in the school year. Most school districts exceed these minimums, partly in order to qualify for various financial incentives from the state.

California law sets 175 days as the minimum school year. However:

- Under current law, districts receive extra funding for increasing their school year to 180 teaching days, but they are allowed to use up to eight of these days for staff development. In effect, then, the minimum number of instructional days for students in California schools is 172, although teachers are expected to work at least eight days more.
- In 1997 a new law provided a financial incentive to school districts for adding one more instructional day. The law also included requirements for scheduling staff development days and notifying parents about minimum days.

State law also specifies minimum requirements for a school day. However:

- Districts that provide a specified number of instructional minutes annually receive extra funding. High schools must, in addition, offer a six-period day. The net effect of this program, in combination with the longer school year, is that kindergartners attend class about 3.5 hours a day; grades 1-8 about five hours; and high schoolers about six hours. School districts must keep track of precisely how many minutes students are in class at each school every year to get the funding.

Parameters for the minimum amount of time schools must be in session are set by the state. But decisions about additional time and how it's used typically are made at the school or district level. Choices are often constrained, however, by legal and financial considerations, staff and parent preferences, and even the bus schedule. Student needs and instructional benefits sometimes get lost in the process.

How students are taught

"Stay in your seat."

"Don't talk to your neighbor."

"Read this book and fill out the worksheet."

"Find the one right answer."

These are traditional expectations for students, but decades of research on how children learn calls such approaches into question. Brain research highlights the need for learners to explore material in greater depth and make connections. Theories about multiple intelligences suggest that many students learn best when they move around and talk to others. Learning research also indicates that many students learn more by "doing" in addition to just hearing or seeing information.

All of this has led to an ongoing re-examination of how teachers teach. Out of both theory and experimentation has come a substantial body of knowledge about effective teaching and learning.

For example, teachers are urged to use a variety of grouping strategies within the classroom. This means alternating between whole class, small group, and individual instruction on a regular and routine basis. Teachers also are being encouraged to continually measure how well every student is progressing and modify instruction for individuals to provide appropriate challenges or improve skills. New technologies also can have a dramatic effect on the ways that teachers teach and students learn.

The call for more varied and complex approaches to classroom teaching challenges the skills of teachers. And to be effective, not only must teachers master new skills, they also must adapt their approach to the unique needs of their students in the context of their school, school district, and local community. In addition, they often have to confront issues of time and grouping, such as changes in teaching style appropriate for classrooms of 20 instead of 30 students. Community, school, and school district leaders can play an important role by supporting and encouraging quality teaching that incorporates learning research.

Trying to put it all together

At any public school in California, you are likely to see some new approaches to teaching and learning. These may include integrated subjects in one school, an emphasis on cooperative learning in another, multiage classrooms in another, and "distance learning" through computers and modems in yet another. Somewhere else it might be a combination of all of these in a more systemic approach.

Some schools are crafting an independent vision of school improvement. Others depend on the support and models available through the multitude of school reform networks that have sprung up throughout the United States over the last decade (see box on the next page for some examples). These models are an effort to replicate successful programs and help give schools and districts a head start on school improvement.

California-specific networks also have been created. Some have been spearheaded by local business interests, such as Joint Venture Silicon Valley and LEARN, the Los Angeles Educational Alliance for Restructuring Now. Private foundations are also spearheading regional school reform efforts such as the Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project and the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative. The California Department of Education's (CDE) Challenge School District program represents a network of school districts working together on improvement. These are just a few examples.

NATIONAL MODELS FOR SCHOOL REFORM

The New American Schools Network is a nationwide partnership of leading educational organizations, school-improvement teams, and communities. Each New American Schools design is unique, but shares a commitment to research-based educational practices that raise student achievement. The designs include the following:

- **Authentic Teaching, Learning and Assessment for All Students (ATLAS)** revolves around pathways from elementary through high schools, with a focus on collaboration between educators and with parents.
- **Audrey Cohen College System of Education** promotes a purpose-centered approach to academic learning.
- **Co-NECT Schools** use a technology-rich approach to teaching and learning featuring a project-based curriculum and multi-age cluster teams.
- **Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound** offers curriculum based on "learning expeditions," placing equal value on intellectual and character development.
- **Modern Red Schoolhouse** seeks to make all students high achievers in core academic subjects, instilling shared American beliefs and principles.
- **National Alliance for Restructuring Education**, a partnership that includes schools, districts, states, and national organizations, is based on five design priorities for changing the entire education system: standards and assessments, learning environments, community services and supports, public engagement, and high performance management.
- **Roots & Wings** is an elementary school design built on the premise that schools must do whatever it takes to make sure all students succeed and develop both a firm academic foundation and the capacity for advanced accomplishments.

The Accelerated Schools Project promotes a comprehensive enrichment strategy to improve the learning of at-risk students by providing them with rich, challenging learning activities usually reserved for gifted and talented students. The program was piloted in two schools in 1987-88 and extended to more than 800 schools in 39 states by 1995-96.

The Coalition of Essential Schools is a nationwide network of more than 700 high schools established in 1984 to improve student learning and achievement. Guided by ideas such as student-as-worker/teacher-as-coach, personalized teaching and curriculum, and performance-based assessment, the Coalition's nine Common Principles challenge schools to reshape their policies, structure, and priorities.

Contact information for these and other networks is listed in "For More Information" at the end of this section.

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No one right way

Changes in school organization and teaching reflect both research into how children learn and experience regarding the best ways to teach them. Changes also are influenced by teaching philosophy and by attempts to achieve other goals for students, such as racial integration or improved behavior.

But one solution isn't right for every school, every teacher, or every child. And instructional strategies such as how to group students and how to structure class time during the day are not goals in themselves. Rather, they represent the means or strategy for accomplishing larger social or educational goals.

The issues are complex, the questions are serious, the conflicts are honest, and the stakes are high. As a result, school leaders who want to implement new class schedules, grouping practices, or teaching strategies do well to openly discuss their plans and the underlying goals with school staffs, parents and other community members, and even students. Open, honest, and regular evaluation about how well instructional practices at a school contribute to the achievement of the agreed-upon goals will further build confidence and trust, particularly when such evaluation uses student performance data.

Experts Say

"Being an effective teacher may be the most difficult job of all in our society. ... An effective teacher is one who is able to convince not half or three quarters but essentially all of his or her students to do quality work in school."

William Glasser
The Quality School

ARE TEACHERS UP TO THE CHALLENGE?

"The system is only as good as its teachers" is a common point of view. Rising expectations for school performance ultimately rest on the classroom teacher. A teacher's willingness and ability to implement new strategies will be at the heart of the success or failure of any attempts to change education. Experience counts, and so does a teacher's capacity to inspire and motivate students. But the quality of teacher education is also critical — both before teachers enter the classroom and as they progress in their careers. California is engaged in multiple efforts to better prepare its teachers to enter today's classrooms and to ensure that once there, they continue to learn how to improve student performance.

Experts Say

"EDUCATION REFORM CAN ONLY SUCCEED IF IT IS BROAD AND COMPREHENSIVE, ATTACKING MANY PROBLEMS SIMULTANEOUSLY. BUT IT CANNOT SUCCEED AT ALL UNLESS THE CONDITIONS OF TEACHING AND TEACHER DEVELOPMENT CHANGE."

WHAT MATTERS MOST: TEACHING FOR AMERICA'S FUTURE NATIONAL COMMISSION ON TEACHING AND AMERICA'S FUTURE

Teacher preparation and credentialing are being re-examined

In recent years, many experts have criticized U.S. teacher preparation programs, particularly in light of changing strategies and standards for improving student achievement. Some critics say teachers are not adequately trained in subject matter or newer teaching strategies, even though student needs and demands for higher academic performance have increased. This is especially problematic for California teachers who work with larger classes, fewer resources, and a more diverse student population than teachers in most states.

In California, statewide data indicate that nearly 40% of new teachers leave the profession after less than five years. This certainly calls into question California's current approach to teacher preparation as well as the support and training new teachers receive when they first enter the classroom. As a result, a number of initiatives are under way to fundamentally reshape teacher preparation and credentialing requirements. While these initiatives are somewhat varied in their focus and approach, they share some common objectives, including:

- better collaboration between K-12 schools and the colleges and universities that prepare teachers;
- making sure knowledge about effective teaching and high academic standards is integrated into teacher preparation programs; and

SOME CALIFORNIA TEACHERS DO NOT HAVE APPROPRIATE CREDENTIALS

In schools, the basic requirement that an adult be present in each classroom must be met. With a shortage of qualified teachers, schools are sometimes forced to compromise on required qualifications and appropriate credentials.

In a January 1997 publication, *Education Week* reported that in California:

- 49% of secondary teachers in 1994 did not hold a degree in the subject they taught.
- 11% of teachers in 1994 were teaching without a full credential.

In a 1997 analysis of class-size reduction, the California Office of the Legislative Analyst reported:

- Nearly a quarter of the new teachers hired to reduce class sizes in 1996-97 were teaching under emergency permits or waivers of credential requirements.
- In the largest districts (those with more than 20,000 students), about 30% of new hires had an emergency permit or waiver. The average was closer to 10% in districts under 5,000.

EdSource 1998

- more effective induction of new teachers and/or better assessment of the professional competence of teachers as part of the credentialing process.

The traditional model for teacher preparation in California is for a college graduate to take a year of additional coursework and complete a student teaching program run by a college or university before getting into the classroom.

Some school districts committed to improving teacher preparation and already heavily involved in hiring new teachers are working with the state's colleges and universities to create new models. Internship programs, which allow candidates to work closely with experienced teachers, pursue required course work, and learn on the job are one example. Internships not only put teachers on the job sooner, they also make it easier for non-educators, including experienced professionals from business, the military and other fields, to become teachers.

In 1997, a state task force recommended that California institute a "formal induction period" as part of its credentialing process. The induction program would provide newly hired teachers with additional support and include a formal assessment of their abilities. The hope was that such a program could help increase the quality, success, and staying power of teaching candidates once they were in the classroom. The proposal is expected to come before the Legislature and Governor during the 1998 legislative session.

Both new and experienced teachers need ongoing professional development

New teachers usually become permanent employees after working in a school district for two years. Their education, however, is far from over. The expectations for a teacher always have included continuing education, but today the demands have increased. Just like people in any other profession, teachers are expected to keep up with new and rapidly changing techniques, technologies. research, and subject matter.

More and more, experts talk about the need for schools to become learning environments for teachers as well as for their

The Law Says

How to become a fully credentialed* teacher in California

Baseline requirements

- Earn an undergraduate degree in a non-education major.
- Pass the California Basic Educational Skills Test (CBEST), and demonstrate appropriate subject-matter knowledge if pursuing a subject-matter credential for secondary school teaching (such as math or English).

Further education and training are mandatory

- Spend a year in a teacher training program, which includes student teaching, thus earning a preliminary credential,

  OR

- enter an appropriate internship program,

  AND

- within five years, complete additional and specific professional coursework.

* In order to find enough teachers to staff every classroom, school districts may hire someone who does not have a full teaching credential but has either an emergency permit or a waiver. An emergency permit is issued for one year to people entering the profession who have not completed some of the legal requirements for a credential. Waivers can be requested by a school district for any person who does not have the required or appropriate credential for a specific teaching assignment.

students. New learning theories, recommendations for "best practice," curriculum changes, and higher standards all contribute to a burgeoning field of knowledge teachers are expected to master. Moreover, many old models for individual teacher education and "staff development" are criticized as ineffective at improving classroom practices and teacher effectiveness.

In addition, more of California's teachers participate in school and district policy decisions as members of decentralized leadership teams. Both the state's major teachers' unions, California Teachers Association (CTA) and the California Federation of Teachers (CFT), are among the organizations attempting to help prepare teachers to serve more effectively in these new roles.

An area of particular challenge for schools is making sure teachers can use new technologies — most notably computers and the Internet — as tools for teaching, learning, and classroom management. More teachers, for example, are using computers both to teach students and to keep track of their performance. And a growing number are using voice mail, e-mail, and the World Wide Web to communicate with parents and professional colleagues.

The effective integration of technology into other curriculum areas is placing tremendous demands on educators. Many of the most successful programs for teacher education in technology have occurred because school districts received technical assistance, resources, and expertise from their local business communities. Such partnership opportunities are not available in all California school districts, however.

Evaluating and improving teacher performance

A few teachers truly are not up to the challenges they face in today's classroom. Some need help and honest feedback so they can be more effective or turn to another profession. And even the best teachers need the guidance and perspective that can come with an open, skillful evaluation of their performance by other education professionals, be they teachers or administrators.

The requirement for teacher evaluation is built into the system, but the quality of the evaluation can differ from district to district and school to school. The state's legal framework for teacher evaluation was established

in the Stull Act in 1976 and is part of the Education Code. It requires every school board to establish a system for evaluating the performance of teachers and school administrators. It further specifies that the evaluation shall take into consideration student progress, effective use of instructional techniques, adherence to curricular objectives, and creation of a suitable learning environment.

California also has embarked on a state-level effort to help create a common understanding of what makes a good teacher. Early in 1997 the CDE and the Commission on Teacher Credentialing published standards for the teaching profession. At the national level, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) is developing standards for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do, along with a system of advanced certification for teachers who meet the standards. California used the NBPTS standards as a guide in developing its own teaching standards.

Many new teachers needed

Making sure all teachers are skilled and qualified is challenging enough when there are plenty graduating from teaching programs. But when the demand for teachers outstrips the supply, especially in specialty areas, it means that some districts are hiring teachers who aren't as fully qualified or skilled as is ideal. The impact of this kind of shortage often depends on a school district's ability to compete for teachers on the basis of salary and working conditions. In general, small suburban districts are often considered more attractive workplaces than large urban ones.

With the continuing growth of the student population, California's commitment to reducing class sizes, and a growing proportion of teachers nearing retirement age, the state's schools are facing a critical teacher shortage. The California Office of the Legislative Analyst estimated a need for at least 34,000 new teachers in 1996-97 alone.

The first challenge is to find enough qualified teaching candidates. Educators worry that they lose many of the best and brightest college students to careers that offer more money or prestige and fewer daunting challenges. In the last decade, greater professional opportunities in other fields for women and minorities have further diminished the number of qualified teaching candidates.

California standards for the teaching profession

The California Department of Education and the Commission on Teacher Credentialing recommend standards organized around six interrelated categories of teaching practice:

- Engaging and supporting all students in learning
- Creating and maintaining effective environments for student learning
- Understanding and organizing subject matter for student learning
- Planning instruction and designing learning experiences for all students
- Assessing student learning
- Developing as a professional educator

Experts Say

In 1996 the California Statewide Task Force on Teacher Recruitment outlined three strategies for identifying and preparing the more than 20,000 new teachers California needs every year. They included:

- Expanding the pool of prospects by reaching out more aggressively to people who might be interested in teaching.
- Strengthening the pipeline into teaching by more closely linking high schools, community colleges, and four-year institutions that provide career guidance and other incentives to teaching candidates.
- Removing unnecessary barriers that now exist in state programs and policies, making it easier for candidates to pursue a credential.

In addition to the general need for more teachers, California has acute shortages in a few specific areas. First, while the children attending school in California are extraordinarily diverse ethnically and linguistically, the state's teachers are not. The teacher presiding over the classroom is most likely to be a white woman. About 80% of California's teachers are white (compared with 40% of students) and 70% are women (compared with 50% of students). In addition, school districts have great difficulty finding teachers with the specialist credentials required to teach English language learners and Special Education students. A perennial shortage of math and science teachers also persists.

OTHER SCHOOL STAFF AFFECT INSTRUCTIONAL QUALITY

Teachers are not the only ones who affect the quality and shape of school instruction. Others — such as school principals, district office administrators, school secretaries, custodians, librarians, and school nurses — help determine how well schools educate their students.

The role of the school administrator: pulling it all together

When many in the public think of school administrators — such as district superintendents, assistant superintendents, and school principals — they think of someone responsible for budgets and paperwork. But school administrators are also responsible for instructional leadership. They work with teachers — and ideally parents — to set the instructional vision and priorities for a school, and to make sure they match those of the school district and governing board. Administrators also take the lead in identifying changes that will further that vision and figuring out how to implement them.

School administrators are also responsible for recruiting and evaluating teachers, and ensuring that teacher professional development is related to improved student performance. Strong instructional leaders make improved student learning a clear and high priority. They can push ineffective teachers to improve their skills and support creative, effective teachers in their endeavors.

Equally challenging, the school administrator must serve as the bridge between parents, teachers, and students when various instructional goals or priorities in the school conflict.

Building the leadership skills of school administrators

Just as teachers need professional development to fill their increasingly complex roles, so too do school administrators. The stakes are now very high for public school administrators, and the job challenges are complex. This is particularly true given public pressure to improve school operations and student learning through strategic planning and evaluation; improved personnel management and contract negotiations; sound fiscal management of a complex school budgeting process; improved communications with parents and community; and instructional leadership to raise student academic performance. Increasing the availability and quality of professional education and peer support can help administrators successfully meet those challenges.

California administrators have three main resources for extending their learning opportunities: regional School Leadership Center Academies; programs such as academies, summer institutes, and superintendent symposia delivered by the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA); and district-designed or selected programs, including some privately funded efforts.

In recent years, districts have placed a particular focus on developing the skills and knowledge of school principals and other site administrators. With the increasing emphasis on site-based management, the principal's job has changed probably more dramatically than any other in the public school system. Principals are being called upon to help their professional staffs develop school-specific approaches to instruction. This is in addition to the principal's other responsibilities related to budgeting, community relations, compliance with legal requirements, and the basic management of the work of teachers, staff, and students.

Many school district superintendents also have sought more leadership training. Some of this training has been developed in conjunction with business leaders and incorporates the concepts and approaches that corporate leadership is using to transform business organizations, such as total quality management.

School "infrastructures" affect teaching and instruction

The need to improve and enhance the physical infrastructure that supports teaching — such resources as science laboratories, library books,

Experts Say

"A QUALITY LEADERSHIP INFRASTRUCTURE EMPHASIZES THE PREVENTION OF PROBLEMS (SUCH AS STUDENT FAILURE) AS OPPOSED TO SHORT-TERM FIXES OR THE COVERING UP OF PROBLEMS, AND FOCUSES ON THE CREATION OF A LEARNING ORGANIZATION THAT ENCOURAGES EVERYONE TO CONTRIBUTE TO MAKING SCHOOL HAVE A CUMULATIVE, PURPOSEFUL EFFECT ON STUDENT LEARNING."

VICTORIA L. BERNHARDT
THE SCHOOL PORTFOLIO: A COMPREHENSIVE FRAMEWORK FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

media centers, and modern technology — has been receiving increased attention in California in the past several years. But an equally important factor influencing teaching and learning is the quality of the "human infrastructure" a school provides its students and teachers.

These are the professional support staff who help make sure students get all they can from their education. School guidance counselors in middle and high school advise and discipline students, and help students choose the most appropriate and challenging classes for their goals and abilities. School nurses keep infectious diseases down in the school community, and help the growing number of students with chronic illnesses — such as asthma, allergies, and diabetes — manage their symptoms so they do not interfere with learning. As the amount of information in the world skyrockets, school librarians are becoming more important in teaching students to find and filter information, whether it's in the card catalog or on the Internet. In California, the number of these support professionals has been profoundly cut, particularly in comparison with national averages (see the School Funding section).

Paraprofessionals and other staff provide vital support

School employees who are not credentialed educators — generally referred to as classified or non-certificated staff — are also an integral part of school operations. In their roles as school secretaries, library technicians, health clerks, custodians, and instructional assistants, they often work closely with students in direct support of the instructional program. The school's capacity to provide a quality education depends in part on the abilities and attitudes of these employees.

Increasingly, these staff people are demanding and often winning a greater voice in various aspects of school operations, particularly in light of efforts to shift some decision making from central district offices to individual schools. Some districts are providing paraprofessional training — much like paralegals receive — to classified staff members who work directly with students.

Paraprofessionals also represent a large and important pool of potential teachers. As community members or parents, they are vital links between schools and communities, and they typically reflect the ethnic and socioeconomic diversity of those communities.

Experts Say

"All classified employees either interact regularly with students on a personal level or provide services affecting the environment in which students are expected to learn. The education community needs the practical perspective of classified employees to bring workable improvement to a system that affects the future livelihood of our children and our neighbors' children."

Proposals for Progress in California Public Education
California School Employees Association

ISSUES AND TRENDS

NO "ONE BEST SYSTEM" FOR ALL SCHOOLS

At one time, the prevailing wisdom was that all public schools should teach the same curriculum, the same way. Implicit in this approach was the understanding — not often spoken aloud — that some students would naturally succeed in school and others would fail. It was accepted that the reason students failed was a lack of academic ability; rarely was the teacher's ability or the method of instruction called into question.

The growing public and workplace demands to educate more of the student body to higher levels of achievement require higher minimum standards and more broad-based student success. This is "raising the bar" of academic achievement for students, but it is also raising the bar on what is expected of teachers and public schools. Most experts believe that to meet this new challenge, curriculum and instruction must be tailored more closely to the differing needs of students.

Educators are expected to make the system work better for all students in their schools, whether those students come from a wealthy, well-educated community, a poverty-stricken inner-city area, or a family of migrant farm workers. This expectation requires teachers and schools to assess the diverse needs of their students, understand and master many different instructional strategies, and know how to use those strategies to motivate each student to learn.

As a result, schools are re-examining how they are organized and what teaching methods they use. But while most parents, teachers, and school administrators agree that change is needed, they often disagree about what specific changes will best serve schools and students.

Those who resist a particular change may do so because of distrust or cynicism based on previous experiences, or because of a lack of definitive research supporting the change. They may believe the proposed change will make things worse for teachers, for the majority of students, or maybe just for their own children. They may be firmly convinced that this particular aspect of the existing system works well just as it is.

- How should students be grouped to ensure that each individual receives appropriate, challenging coursework?
- How do we know when school change is necessary? And how can we strike a balance between ongoing student learning and experiments with new ways of educating students?
- What role should parents and other community members play in decisions about instruction?
- How will educators find the time they need to keep up with their rapidly changing profession?
- How can teacher development programs be strengthened so both new and experienced teachers are able to meet students' academic needs?

Experts Say

"If California is to move confidently into the 21st century, it must ... [transform] the state's one-size-fits-all school system into a dynamic, flexible system of schools capable of meeting the needs of the largest and most diverse student population in the nation."

Rising to the Challenge
Education Commission of the States

Educators often see themselves as being caught in the middle. They stand between the rising demands for better education for all students and the increasing needs and diversity of the students they see each day. They must respond to new learning theories and instructional approaches while not abandoning tried-and-true teaching methods. If there is disagreement within a faculty, teachers sometimes have to choose between loyalty to their co-workers and a professional commitment to student success. And they must grapple with the competing and often conflicting needs, expectations, and demands of administrators, students, parents, and government regulations.

INCREASED PARENT INTEREST IN INSTRUCTION

Parents often are drawn into school involvement by issues related to teaching and instruction, because their effect on students is so clear and direct. Involvement frequently begins with a tightly focused concern. For example, if a child's teacher is not a particularly good match to the child, parents may insist on more frequent communication with the teacher about what is needed to help the child succeed. Or a parent may object to a new curriculum the school is using.

Many parents also have strong opinions about the best way to teach and organize a school. These parents may work to establish a charter school, or wait in long lines to ensure a spot for their child in a special theme school, such as "back to basics," "developmental," "dual-language immersion," or a "performing arts magnet."

Parents who remain in the local neighborhood school may also advocate strongly on instructional decisions, such as grouping students by ability or block scheduling in high school. Increasingly, parents want the instructional philosophy and priorities of the school to match their own educational priorities, and they want the teaching style of the teacher to work well with their child's learning style. This strong consumerism challenges the professional and communication skills of teachers and administrators. It also drives much of the growing parent interest in school "choice."

MORE TIME FOR EDUCATORS TO IMPROVE THEIR ABILITIES

Public opinion polls show that the public wants teachers to continue their own education, but not when it takes away from their time in the classroom. Parents often criticize school staff-development days because they feel this time robs classroom instruction and disrupts family schedules.

The dilemma is, to some extent, financial. Teacher salaries and benefits typically represent more than half of school district expenditures, and each additional day of school — or additional non-instructional time in the current school day — costs significantly. The state does not prevent school districts from increasing the amount of time devoted to staff development, but neither has it provided a great deal of funding to do so.

The professional development needs of school administrators are less controversial with parents because their training does not directly reduce student instruction time. In addition, their work year is generally longer. But while the public is aware of the need for teacher training, it has less understanding of the need for ongoing training for the increasingly complex job of school administration.

In addition, some roadblocks stand between administrators and their own learning. One obstacle is time. When you talk with administrators about time constraints, you hear: "There is no downside when I don't spend time on my own learning. There is a dramatic downside if I don't attend to these hundred other things I'm expected to do."

A second roadblock is some administrators' belief that somehow it is wrong for adults to spend precious time and resources on themselves because the business of education is to serve the learning of others, not to be served. Added to this is the fear that merely by engaging in training, an administrator admits, "I don't know it all."

Experts Say

"SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS SOMETIMES SUFFER FROM A BURDEN OF ASCRIBED OMNISCIENCE. THE WORLD THINKS THEY KNOW HOW TO DO IT ALL. BUT WHO INSPIRES MORE CONFIDENCE, WHO IS THE BETTER LEADER? THE ADMINISTRATOR WHO IS LEARNED AND WISE, OR THE ADMINISTRATOR WHO IS A LIFELONG, INSATIABLE LEARNER?"

JANE ZINNER
ASSOCIATION OF CALIFORNIA SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

TEACHERS IN OTHER COUNTRIES SPEND MORE TIME ON PLANNING

In the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), researchers examined how eighth-grade math and science teachers in three countries spent their time.

	U.S.	JAPAN	GERMANY
Periods of teaching per week (math)	26	16	24
Periods of teaching per week (science)	25	18	25
Average class size	24-25	37	24-25
Expectations for non-teaching time	**At school, student supervision & planning**	**At school, student counseling, admin. duties & planning**	**Leave when teaching done, often plan at home, very few non-teaching tasks**
Percentage meeting formally on curriculum issues once a month or more	60	76	44

From these findings, the researchers concluded that both German and Japanese teachers have more time for planning built into their regular work schedule than U.S. teachers do. In addition, because they remain in school but not in the classroom, Japanese teachers have considerably more opportunity to work with their colleagues formally and informally on curriculum.

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WAYS TO GET INVOLVED

ACTIONS TO TAKE

Re-examining school structures and instructional strategies

In your local school and district: In theory, a school's schedule, teaching approaches, and grouping practices should align with its curriculum and student performance goals. In practice, many school debates are over changes in this area because they directly and immediately affect students and all the adults involved. Further, not everyone can agree on the merits of what is gained versus the concern over what is lost. There is no one right answer, and the trade-offs must be examined closely and fairly.

A school community can begin by fully and impartially researching the effectiveness of various strategies and considering how that evidence relates to the documented needs of the school's students.

Administrators can involve parent leaders and teachers early in the research and review process, remain open to differing opinions and concerns, and communicate clearly, openly, and frequently with everyone who will be affected by the change.

In California as a whole: With very few exceptions, decisions about school structure and teaching have been left to local discretion, within some broad state parameters. State policymakers need to think carefully about the appropriate balance between state and local decision making in this area, and be clear about the effects of their decisions on students and schools.

Give educators more time for learning

In your school: School leaders can do a better job explaining to parents and students the significance of staff development days. Inviting parents to attend staff development sessions can help them see the value and perhaps also build stronger continuity between home and school. Parent leaders and community members also can be more outspoken in support of teacher training and work with school officials to mitigate the scheduling problems that often frustrate parents when students have days off.

"If it's not broken don't **fix** *it."*

"Schools must **change** *to keep up with the world."*

"Teachers need time to **learn** *too."*

"Our kids don't spend enough **time** *in school."*

"Not another **in-service** *day!"*

In your school district: School communities need to find more time for professional development without reducing instructional days for students. School districts, through their regular budget process, can make this a higher priority and decide to pay teachers, administrators, and classified employees to spend more non-school time on their own learning.

In California as a whole: State legislators could build on their 1997 investment by providing funding for more instructional days while maintaining state support for eight staff development days. They could also look at additional support for the training and assessment of newly hired teachers.

Make sure professional development is effective

In your local school and district: When the time and money for staff development are so precious, school board members, administrators, and teachers need to ensure that staff time spent in professional development really counts. This means making sure that content focuses on improving student performance; is based when possible on a data-driven analysis of that performance; is well-presented; and helps educators incorporate the new knowledge and skills into their daily work.

As appropriate, adding a parent education component to professional development can help school staffs build support at home for new educational approaches at school.

Through the collective bargaining process, teacher unions and school district leaders also could examine the existing system for increasing teacher salaries based on their continuing education to make sure it dovetails with other professional development goals.

Spell out high standards for teachers

In your local school and district: School board members, school administrators, teacher leaders, and community members can make sure the school district has clear standards for teacher performance. One step is to become more familiar with the California Standards for the Teaching Profession adopted in 1997. Another is to make sure that the district's

teacher evaluation process aligns with the standards. While individual evaluations must be kept confidential, the general policies and procedures are usually part of governing board policies, administrative regulations, and union contracts — all of which are public documents.

In California as a whole: State leaders could put a high profile on the new teaching standards and communicate them to the larger community as well as to educators. They also could consider using the work done at the national level to further inform and perhaps guide California's work on teacher preparation, licensing, and program accreditation.

Keep a focus on teacher recruitment and preparation issues

In your school district: While these issues are largely out of the hands of the average citizen, the public can stay informed about how they affect local schools. Parents and community members can ask district officials for an accounting of the number of teachers with emergency permits or inappropriate credentials and find out what measures are being taken to address the issues that may arise.

K-12 school administrators and teachers should take the initiative to work with universities and to speak up about the training needed in order to do a better job teaching today's students.

In your community: Private foundations, corporations, research centers, and policymakers can elevate the importance of these issues by making them a research priority. California's colleges and universities can continue to examine the adequacy of their teacher preparation programs and can spend more time talking with K-12 educators about improvements they'd like to see in teacher preparation classes. They also can partner with school districts to provide teaching candidates with increased exposure to classroom realities.

"Why don't those teachers ***just*** **work harder?"**

"That teacher **changed** *my life."*

"I **wouldn't do** *that job!"*

IF YOU'RE WONDERING

Why do schools need to change anyway?
— turn to Changing World, Section A.

How do schools decide what they will teach?
— turn to Curriculum, Section B.

How do schools know if changes are effective?
– turn to Student Performance, Section C.

What extra funding is available to support school improvement efforts?
— turn to School Funding, Section E.

What role can and should non-educators play in school change?
— turn to Shared Responsibility, Section G.

WHERE TO GO FOR ANSWERS

Teachers can explain how they teach a subject and the rationale behind their approach. They can also describe the grouping strategies they use in their own classrooms.

School principals should be able to answer questions about how students are grouped and assigned to classes; the school schedule; the skills and abilities of the school staff in general; and areas where staff development is focused. They can't answer questions that violate the privacy of any individual employee.

District office administrators responsible for personnel can summarize the experience levels of teachers, including those teaching with emergency permits or waivers. Those responsible for staff development can describe teacher education programs and often are also responsible for parent education.

The local school board may have policies on student grouping practices. The board also seeks input through public hearings on matters decided through collective bargaining, such as school calendar, length of the school day, and some professional development issues.

Individual reform networks can provide general information and usually local contacts who can explain their philosophy and successes.

The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing has information about teacher credentialing requirements, the CBEST exam, and paraprofessional training programs.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ...

School Organization and Instruction

Prisoners of Time

An independent advisory body charged with comprehensively reviewing the relationship between time and learning in U.S. schools found that American students spend significantly less time than their Japanese, French, and German counterparts on core academic subjects. Among its eight recommendations: redesigning schools around learning instead of time and giving teachers more preparation time. National Education Commission on Time and Learning, 1994

www.emich.edu/public/emu_programs/tlc/toc.html

The Basic School: A Community for Learning
Ernest L. Boyer

Based on proven components of effective education, the author presents a comprehensive vision of elementary education, promoting the concepts of community, curriculum coherence, climate, and character as fundamental building blocks. Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1995

California Princeton Fulfillment Services
1445 Lower Ferry Road
Ewing, NJ 08618
800/777-4726 or 609/883-1759
fax: 800/999-1958 or 609/883-7413

Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution

Developed by a commission of practitioners, this report conveys a vision for improving the quality of education and preparing high schools for the next millennium, focused on a more student-centered, personalized approach. 1996

National Association of Secondary School Principals
1904 Association Drive
Reston, VA 22091
703/860-0200

The Quality School

See the Curriculum section.

The Power of Their Ideas
Deborah Meier

This book describes the tremendous success of New York City's Central Park East schools. Serving low-income, minority students, these schools empower staff to make meaningful decisions, foster "habits of the mind" that challenge students to think critically, use an integrated curriculum, and keep classes and schools small. Beacon Press, 1995.

Teaching and Teachers

Achieving World-Class Standards: The Challenge for Educating Teachers

This report summarizes the proceedings of a 1992 Office of Educational Research and Improvement study group convened to explore how teacher education should respond to the challenges of teaching all students to world-class standards. 1993

U.S. Department of Education
U.S. Government Printing Office
Superintendent of Documents
Mail Stop: SSOP
Washington, DC 20402-9328

Blueprint for Excellence

This article outlines the California Teachers Association's proposed policy positions on current reform topics relating to K-12 public schools, including standards and accountability, school choice, and teacher training and certification. 1996

California Teachers Association
P.O. Box 921
Burlingame, CA 94011-0921
650/697-1406

Essential Questions and Practices in Professional Development

As part of a larger effort to make information available regarding "best practice" in professional development for educators, this report summarizes the latest research and provides a framework for evaluating current programs and policies. University School Support for Education Reform, 1997

Catherine Conway
Assistant Dean of the College of Education
San Francisco State University
1600 Holloway Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94133
415/338-3280
fax: 415/338-7019
http://thecity.sfsu.edu/~usser/pd

Recruiting, Preparing, and Credentialing California's Teachers

California faces many challenges in its effort to find and appropriately educate qualified teachers for its growing needs. This report summarizes state and national strategies to address these issues.

EdSource
4151 Middlefield Road,
Suite 100
Palo Alto, CA 94303-4743
650/857-9604
fax: 650/857-9618
www.edsource.org

Splintered Vision
William H. Schmidt, Curtis C. McKnight, and Senta A. Raizen

This study of the results of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study examines the nature of curriculum and suggests that a possible reason the U.S. ranks below other countries in student performance is that its curriculum is overly broad, fragmented, and superficial, hence sacrificing depth and rigor of knowledge. U.S. National Research Center for TIMSS at Michigan State University, 1996

What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future

This report offers a strategy for recruiting, preparing, and supporting excellent teachers in all of America's schools to ensure that teachers have the knowledge and skills they need so that all children can learn. 1996

National Commission on Teaching & America's Future
P.O. Box 5239
Woodbridge, VA 22194-5239
212/678-3015

Administrators and Other School Staff

Straight Talk About School Administrators

This report examines perceptions and data about administrators in California's public schools. 1996

Association of California School Administrators
Communications Department
1517 L Street
Sacramento, CA 95814
916/444-3216
fax: 916/444-3245

Proposals for Progress in California Public Education

California School Employees Association's reform proposals focus on the areas of education improvement about which California's classified school employees have a unique interest and expertise. 1996

CSEA
2045 Lundy Avenue
San Jose, CA 95131
800/632-2128

FOR MORE INFORMATION ... (CONTINUED)

Education Reform Initiatives

In California

Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC), supported by the Hewlett-Annenberg Challenge and other private sources, BASRC's mission is to transform teaching and learning for all students in the six-county Bay Area.

Merrill Vargo
Executive Director
730 Harrison Street
San Francisco, CA 94107-1242
415/241-2740
fax: 415/241-2746
www.wested.org/basrc

Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project (LAAMP) is a coalition of civic, educational, and business organizations working with school professionals and policymaking bodies on behalf of L.A. County's 1.6 million school children.

350 S. Bixel Street, Suite 295
Los Angeles, CA 90017
213/580-8888
www.gseis.ucla.edu/LAMP/Lamp.html

Los Angeles Educational Alliance for Restructuring Now (LEARN), L.A. Unified School District's major systemic initiative, gives local schools greater autonomy to decide on budgets, staff selection, and curriculum. Started in 1993-94, over one-third of the district's 850 schools participate in LEARN.

300 S. Grand Avenue
Suite 1160
Los Angeles, CA 90071
213/255-3276
www.lausd.k12.ca.us/orgs/utla/public_html/

Joint Venture: Silicon Valley Network is dedicated to building a world-class educational system for all students in Silicon Valley to become successful, productive citizens in the 21st century.

99 Almaden Boulevard
Suite 700
San Jose, CA 95113-2002
408/271-7213
fax: 408/271-7214
e-mail: jvsvoffice@aol.com
www.jointventure.org

California Center for School Restructuring provides information and workshops based on the lessons learned by schools that participated in California's SB1274 School Restructuring Program.

101 Twin Dolphin Drive
Redwood City, CA 94065-1005
650/802-5340
fax: 650/802-5422

Nationally

Accelerated Schools Project focuses on improving the learning of at-risk students in over 800 schools in 39 states by providing them with rich, challenging learning activities usually reserved for gifted and talented students.

Stanford University
CERAS Building, Room 109
Stanford, CA 94305-3084
650/725-1676
fax: 650/725-6140
www-leland.stanford.edu/group/ASP/

Coalition of Essential Schools is a nationwide network of over 700 high schools established in 1984 to improve student learning and achievement. Guided by ideas such as student-as-worker/teacher-as-coach, personalized teaching and curriculum, and performance-based assessment, the coalition's nine Common Principles challenge schools to reshape their policies, structure, and priorities.

Brown University
Box 1969
Providence, RI 02912
401/863-3384
fax: 401/863-2045
www.ces.brown.edu

New American Schools is a nationwide partnership of innovative school designs, which incorporate research-based educational practices that raise student achievement.

Education Commission of the States
707 17th Street, Suite 2700
Denver, CO 80202-3427
303/299-3600
fax: 303/296-8332
www.naschools.org

NOTES ... QUESTIONS ... IDEAS ...

School Funding

EQUITY, ADEQUACY, EFFICIENCY, AND CONTROL

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ABOUT THIS SECTION

FOCAL POINTS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Agreeing as Californians on what amount of investment in public schools is enough to get the quality of education we want.
- Developing political leadership and public support for reevaluating the state's school finance structure.
- Deciding on the best balance between state and local control over school revenues.
- Making sure state and local school expenditures support school improvement and student achievement.
- Doing away with wasteful or ineffective programs or requirements.
- Facing up to California's school facilities crisis: aging and inadequate buildings and the need for more classrooms and schools.

School funding refers to a set of twins you find in any budget. One is revenues — how much money a school has to spend. The other is expenditures — what a school spends its money on. It's as simple as that. In California, it's also as complex as 994 school districts, more than 50 separate program allocations, and hundreds of state-required account codes.

The revenues for schools must cover both day-to-day operations and long-term needs, such as buildings and buses. State leaders can also direct funds to strategic reform efforts — such as class-size reduction — that they or the public think are important. But even with recent increases in funding, California spends less per student in public schools than most other states. Are school funds adequate to provide the quality of public schools we want California's children to have? If we decide we should invest more, where will we find the dollars we need?

Allocating funds fairly and using them wisely is a practical and political challenge. You can start examining the expenditure process, though, with a few fundamental questions. Do all children have equal access to educational services as required in our state's constitution? Are school funds being managed effectively? Are public priorities reflected in school budgets?

IN CALIFORNIA TODAY

HOW ARE SCHOOLS IN CALIFORNIA FUNDED?

Most Californians have very little idea how public schools in the state are funded. Many assume that local schools get most of their funding from local property taxes. Not true.

In fact, California's current school finance system evolved through a combination of various court decisions, legislative actions, voter-approved initiatives, and government regulations. The result is a system in which school revenues are controlled at the state level.

What follows is a simple explanation of how public schools in California receive their money and the limitations they have on how they can spend it.

The state controls revenues and can decide how schools spend some of the money they receive

Each year in California, the Legislature and Governor determine how much state funding will go to public education. The provisions of a 1988 voter-approved constitutional amendment, Proposition 98, set a minimum level of funding for schools. The Legislature and Governor are free to spend above this amount if they choose.

The state's leaders also can use their power over the budget to influence educational change and how school districts spend some of their funds. They can:

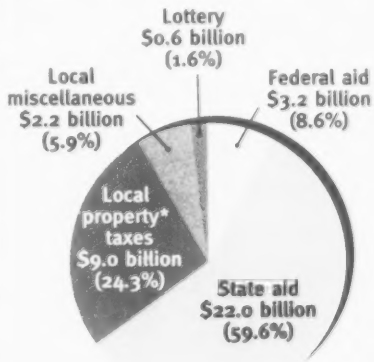
- create special programs such as class-size reduction and mentor teachers;
- cut or reduce funds for other programs such as anti-drug education and deferred maintenance of facilities; and
- require local school districts to meet specific conditions to get their money such as having a school site council in order to get School Improvement Program funds.

On the one hand, this centralized power allows state leaders to back up their educational vision with tangible resources. And it is an attempt to ensure that school districts across the state provide programs of similar quality. On the other hand, state control of

The Hollywood Hills

How much do California schools get?

The total revenues available to K-12 schools vary from year to year. For 1997-98, total funding was projected at almost $37 billion to serve over 5.8 million students. Revenues came from these sources:



* The amount of local property tax that goes to public education is determined by the state Legislature and is limited based on Proposition 13, a constitutional amendment passed by voters in 1978.

Data: California Office of the Legislative Analyst

EdSource 1998

The Law Says

PROPOSITION 98 WAS A CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT PASSED BY THE STATE'S VOTERS IN 1988 AND THEN AMENDED BY PROPOSITION 111 IN 1990.

PROPOSITION 98 PROVIDES A MINIMUM FUNDING GUARANTEE FOR K-12 SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY COLLEGES, BASED ON THREE DIFFERENT TESTS TIED TO GROWTH IN STATE REVENUES. AS A RESULT, SCHOOL REVENUES ARE SUPPOSED TO REFLECT THE VIGOR OF THE STATE ECONOMY. WHEN ECONOMIC GROWTH IN CALIFORNIA WAS FLAT DURING THE EARLY 1990S, PER-PUPIL REVENUES WERE FROZEN. AS THE STATE ECONOMY AND TAX REVENUES SHOWED VIGOROUS GROWTH IN THE MID-1990S, THE TOTAL AMOUNT OF SCHOOL FUNDING INCREASED.

funding can force "one-size-fits-all" solutions on school districts that vary dramatically in their student population and in their community needs and expectations.

School districts are responsible for schools' fiscal management

Though the state funds schools and holds them accountable, local school districts are responsible for managing the funds they receive, within state and federal guidelines.

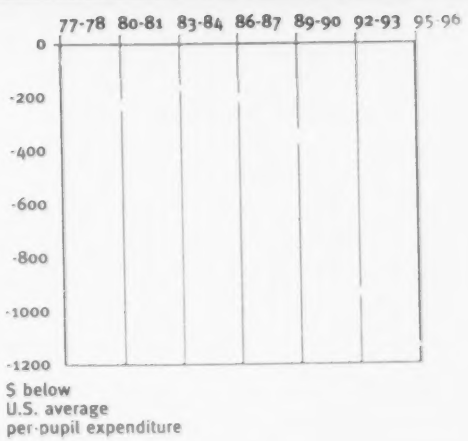
School district revenues and expenditures fall into three basic budget categories: general purpose, categorical, and capital. With only limited exceptions, school districts are required to spend the revenues they receive in each category for specified purposes.

General purpose expenditures cover the ongoing, day-to-day operation of schools, including employee wages and benefits, utility costs, books, and supplies. Of these, wages and benefits are always the largest portion, averaging about 80% of most districts' annual operating expenses. General purpose revenues come largely from a school district's revenue limit. The state determines this per-student allocation, which varies somewhat in amount from one district to another, and between elementary, high school, and unified districts. It includes a combination of local property taxes and state funding.

CALIFORNIA SPENDS LESS PER STUDENT THAN THE NATIONAL AVERAGE

Per-pupil spending for 1995-96 was $4,977, which placed the state 41st in per-pupil expenditures. This was $1,126 less than the 1995-96 national average of $6,103, based on figures from the National Education Association.

The California Legislative Analyst's Office estimated that 1996-97 school expenditures, which included an increase used to reduce class sizes in grades K-3, would be approximately $5,350. This is $747 below the 1995-96 national average, a figure that is also likely to increase. Official per-pupil expenditure numbers are not finalized until several months after each school year ends.



Data: National Education Association, *Rankings of the States*, 1995-96

EdSource 1998

Categorical aid covers a wide variety of programs designed to help and encourage public schools to accomplish specific educational objectives. In each school district, the categorical revenues are based on the characteristics of the district and the programs for which it qualifies or applies. Districts vary widely in the categorical programs they operate.

California has more than 50 separate categorical programs, ranging from school lunch programs to mentor teachers to Special Education. Some are completely voluntary and some help cover expenses associated with programs the district is required to provide. Still others are incentive programs, like class-size reduction, that encourage districts to make changes. Categorical revenues come from both the state and federal governments. The proportion of school funding earmarked for specific programs has increased steadily in the last decade.

School districts often have to take money from their general operating budgets to cover the full cost of categorical programs. In the case of Special Education, for example, districts on average pay about a fourth of the cost of these services from their general funds. This is commonly called "encroachment." Sometimes district contributions are mandatory. Other times they are at the discretion of the school district.

Capital expenditures include the purchase, construction, repair, and maintenance of school properties and equipment. Revenues to pay for capital needs can come from state bond moneys, local bond measures, proceeds from the sale of district property, fees paid by local real estate developers, and interest earnings.

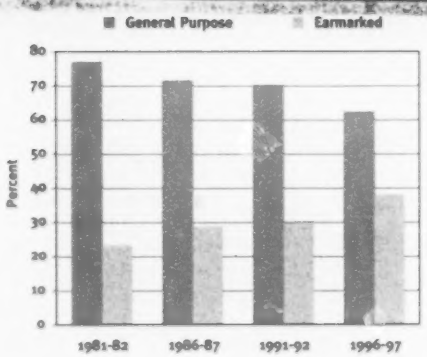
The Law Says

A FEW CALIFORNIA SCHOOL DISTRICTS ARE DESIGNATED AS **"BASIC AID"** AND FUNDED DIFFERENTLY (51 OF THEM IN 1996-97).

A BASIC AID DISTRICT IS ONE IN WHICH THE AMOUNT OF LOCAL PROPERTY TAXES EXCEEDS THE REVENUE LIMIT ALLOCATION THE STATE WOULD OTHERWISE PROVIDE. THE DISTRICT GETS TO KEEP ALL OF ITS LOCAL PROPERTY TAXES AND IN ADDITION RECEIVES "BASIC AID" FROM THE STATE OF $120 PER PUPIL (OR A MINIMUM OF $2,400 PER DISTRICT). THESE DISTRICTS HAVE MORE MONEY PER STUDENT, BUT UNLIKE OTHER DISTRICTS DO NOT RECEIVE ADDITIONAL FUNDS AS A RESULT OF ENROLLMENT GROWTH.

A GREATER PROPORTION OF SCHOOL FUNDS IS EARMARKED

The proportion of school revenues available to school districts as general assistance — as opposed to being earmarked for a special purpose — has steadily declined since 1981-82.



Data: California Governors' Budget, various years

EdSource 1998

The Law Says

AT LEAST 34% OF THE RECEIPTS FROM THE **CALIFORNIA STATE LOTTERY** MUST BE DISTRIBUTED TO LOCAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS, COLLEGES, AND UNIVERSITIES. THIS ACCOUNTS FOR ABOUT 2% OF SCHOOL DISTRICT REVENUES, BUT THE AMOUNT FLUCTUATES FROM YEAR TO YEAR. IN 1995-96, THE LOTTERY PROVIDED ABOUT $124 PER K-12 STUDENT.

School districts have little ability to raise extra revenues

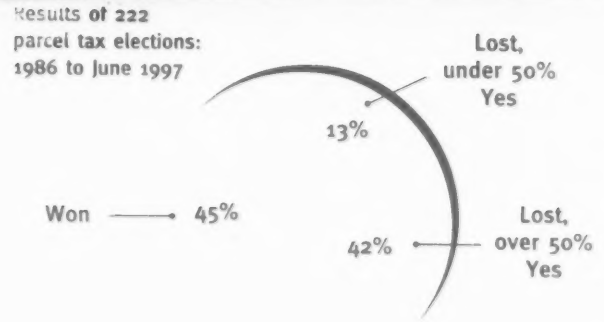
Since the state has a single property tax rate, local school districts in California have very few opportunities to raise additional funds, no matter what their needs. The funds they do raise are reflected in the Local Miscellaneous category of revenues, which in 1996-97 was expected to make up 6.4% of schools' total revenues. These miscellaneous funds generally come into a district in small amounts from a variety of sources.

Special private or public grants occasionally are available to fund special programs, such as school improvement initiatives and model programs. Local residents, through parent organizations and education foundations, often provide additional discretionary funding. Except in rare instances, this special funding is only a small proportion of the school budget as a whole.

In addition, school districts can ask their local voters for additional general purpose funding through increased local taxes in the form of a parcel tax. These special levies currently require a two-thirds approval from local voters. Although more of these elections have succeeded in recent years, two-thirds is a formidable goal to reach. In the early 1990s, state lawmakers attempted to lower the approval threshold for parcel tax elections to a simple majority through legislation. Governor Wilson vetoed the bill, saying a constitutional amendment was necessary.

Because a free public education is constitutionally guaranteed to all Californians, public schools are not legally allowed to charge for services that are considered an integral part of the educational program. This means they can assess fees to defray costs for home-to-school transportation but not for textbooks. And while they often ask for donations for school-sponsored sports programs, schools cannot require that a student "pay to play." Schools vary widely in their interpretation of and adherence to these legal restraints.

RESULTS OF LOCAL PARCEL TAX ELECTIONS



California law requires that parcel tax elections — which schools hold to try to get additional operating funds — must be approved by a two-thirds vote.

Data: EdSource and School Services of California, Inc.

EdSource 1998

SCHOOL FUNDS — ADEQUACY VERSUS EFFICIENCY

Debates about school funding often focus on two related topics: the adequacy of funding and whether school funds are efficiently and effectively spent.

For 20 years California's per-pupil spending declined compared with the rest of the United States. An analysis of these spending trends offers valuable insights into the priorities California has set and the trade-offs made during those years. Comparing school district data with state averages can provide similar information on a local scale.

Evaluating how *efficiently* schools spend their money is more complex and perhaps most appropriately done one district at a time.

How California compares with other states

Relative to its per-capita personal income, California was 41st in its "effort" on behalf of public schools in 1995-96. This represents a significant decline since 1972. California also lags behind most of the country in numerous measures of school quality, including scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

LOWEST STAFF-TO-STUDENT RATIO

1995-96	U.S. Average	California	Rank*
Total school staff to students	1 to 9	1 to 12	50
Professional staff to students			
District officials/administrators	1 to 909	1 to 2,569	49
School principal & asst. principals	1 to 372	1 to 536	50
Teachers	1 to 17	1 to 24	51
Guidance counselors	1 to 512	1 to 1,082	51
Librarians	1 to 882	1 to 6,179	51
Support staff to students			
Administrative support staff	1 to 310	1 to 278	12
Instructional coordinators	1 to 1,331	1 to 1,182	27
School & library support staff	1 to 189	1 to 194	25
Instructional aides	1 to 91	1 to 97	32
Student support staff	1 to 314	1 to 554	41
Other support services staff	1 to 43	1 to 74	47

* Includes District of Columbia

Data: National Center for Education Statistics, 1997

EdSource 1998

The Law Says

PROPOSITION 13, AN INITIATIVE PASSED BY VOTERS IN 1978, CREATED A STATEWIDE PROPERTY TAX RATE AND ELIMINATED THE POWER OF LOCAL SCHOOL BOARDS TO DECIDE ON THEIR OWN TO INCREASE LOCAL PROPERTY TAXES. INSTEAD, BOARDS CAN ASK THE COMMUNITY TO VOTE IN FAVOR OF A PARCEL TAX. BOARDS ALSO ARE AUTHORIZED TO ACCEPT PRIVATE DONATIONS AND GRANTS, AND TO LEASE SURPLUS SCHOOL FACILITIES TO BOTH PUBLIC AND PRIVATE USERS. THE INTENT BEHIND PROPOSITION 13 WAS TO STANDARDIZE PROCEDURES FOR ASSESSING PROPERTIES, REDUCE PROPERTY TAXES, AND LIMIT FUTURE TAX INCREASES. THE PRACTICAL EFFECTS INCLUDED CUTTING LOCAL PROPERTY TAX REVENUES DRAMATICALLY AND MAKING K-12 SCHOOLS DEPENDENT ON THE STATE.

The Law Says

CALIFORNIA IS THE ONLY STATE WITH A LAW PROHIBITING SCHOOLS FROM HAVING TOO MANY ADMINISTRATORS. STATE LAW SPECIFIES THE FOLLOWING **MAXIMUM ADMINISTRATOR-TEACHER RATIOS:**

ELEMENTARY DISTRICTS
9 : 100
HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICTS
7 : 100
UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICTS
8 : 100

SCHOOL DISTRICTS ARE FINANCIALLY PENALIZED IF THEY EXCEED THE RATIOS, UNLESS THEY RECEIVE A WAIVER FROM THE STATE. ONLY A FEW DISTRICTS HAVE EVER EXCEEDED THE RATIOS, AND MOST OF THOSE RECEIVED WAIVERS BECAUSE OF SMALL STUDENT ENROLLMENTS.

Even with recent efforts to reduce class size in grades K-3, California has more students per teacher than practically all other states. We also have substantially more students per administrator than the national average and double the number of students per school guidance counselor. And data collected in 1996 show that California had an astounding 6,179 students per school librarian, compared with the U.S. average of 882.

Average teacher salaries in California ranked eighth in the United States in 1996. Many factors can influence these averages, particularly the percentage of new teachers compared with those with more experience and higher salaries.

An improved state economy after 1995 has given schools a significant increase in funding for the first time since 1989. However, it will take many more years of similar or greater increases to bring California up to the U.S. average for per-pupil expenditures.

Do California schools spend their money efficiently?

The answers to that question are as varied as California's 994 school districts. The issue of efficient school operations often comes down to the spending decisions made at the school district and even the school level. And it depends not only on how money is spent, but also on how well the priorities of the community, parents, school staff, and school board all match.

Nevertheless, when people talk about wasteful spending in public schools, certain themes consistently arise.

Some critics point to any resources spent away from the classroom as unnecessary bureaucracy. Experiments with hiring private firms to manage public schools are often based on the conviction that public schools can be managed more efficiently. Many school district officials believe their operations are already extremely efficient. When they defend

CALIFORNIA SCHOOLS HAVE LEAN MANAGEMENT

Type of enterprise	Number of employees per manager, 1993
California Schools	**27.0**
U.S. Schools	15.0
Transportation	9.6
Food Service	8.6
Utilities	7.1
Manufacturing	7.0
Construction	6.7
Mining	5.6
Communications	4.8
Publishing	4.8
Public Administration	3.5

The Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) reports that, on average, California schools have a greater number of employees per manager than is the case in private industry and in schools in other states.

Data: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1993 EdSource 1998

non-classroom expenditures, they tend to point to specific programs — such as staff and curriculum development, basic business operations, and maintenance services — as vital to keeping classrooms operating well. They also may blame state and federal regulations they say include unnecessary costs. Among these is the "mountain of red tape" school districts say they must climb to meet state and federal regulations for categorical programs. Defenders of these requirements contend they are important to ensure that funds are spent appropriately and students are properly served.

A different efficiency question revolves around the non-instructional aspects of school operations such as food preparation, building maintenance, and transportation. Many observers believe these functions can be done most cost-effectively by school districts contracting out to private firms. Critics of outsourcing may dispute the claim that it saves money, or they simply object because outsourcing takes jobs from school district classified personnel. In California, court rulings have tended to put the rights of employees who object to contracting out ahead of any claims that the practice saves money for school districts. In some communities, employees and districts have worked together to significantly increase the efficiency of these operations.

Special program expenditures can also raise charges of inefficiency. One example is Special Education. School districts are compelled by state and federal law to provide "a free and appropriate education" to all children identified as having qualifying disabilities, ranging from learning disabilities such as Attention Deficit Disorder to blindness or deafness. National reports make a good case that Special Education accounts for much of the spending increase in schools in the last two decades. Some people question the high cost associated with educating 11% of students while schools are unable to provide adequately for the rest of the student population. Others bemoan the still-inadequate resources available for meeting the specialized needs of these students. Similar arguments surround virtually every categorical program created to meet the needs of a specific student population.

Statewide data provide a model for looking at district expenditures

Statewide data about average school expenditures provide standards for comparison and models for analyzing and evaluating spending decisions in any California school district. Although not all of California's 994 school districts may be able to claim fiscal efficiency or good management, an anal-

The Law Says

SCHOOL DISTRICTS ARE REQUIRED BY FEDERAL AND STATE LAW TO PROVIDE **SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES** TO STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES. THEY RECEIVE ADDITIONAL FUNDS FOR THIS PURPOSE BUT ALSO MUST SPEND A PORTION OF THEIR OWN GENERAL PURPOSE REVENUES (KNOWN AS ENCROACHMENT) TO PAY FOR THE REQUIRED SERVICES.

SPECIAL EDUCATION IS THE LARGEST CATEGORICAL PROGRAM IN CALIFORNIA. EARMARKED STATE AND FEDERAL FUNDING IN 1996-97 TOTALED MORE THAN $2 BILLION OF A TOTAL EDUCATION BUDGET OF ABOUT $33 BILLION. IT IS ESTIMATED THAT STATE AND FEDERAL AID COVERS ABOUT 75% OF THE TOTAL COST TO SCHOOL DISTRICTS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION.

ABOUT 11% OF CALIFORNIA'S STUDENTS QUALIFY FOR SOME LEVEL OF SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES. EACH STUDENT IDENTIFIED FOR THESE SERVICES IS GUARANTEED AN INDIVIDUAL EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM, AND THIS PROGRAM DETERMINES WHAT SERVICES EACH CHILD RECEIVES. THE FUNDING SYSTEM IS UNDERGOING CHANGE. BY 1998-99, THE STATE WILL DISTRIBUTE FUNDS BASED ON TOTAL STUDENT POPULATION RATHER THAN ON THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS IDENTIFIED FOR SERVICES, WHICH WAS THE METHOD PREVIOUSLY USED. THE EXPENDITURES ARE ALLOCATED THROUGH SPECIAL EDUCATION LOCAL PLANNING AREAS (SELPAS), WHICH MAY OR MAY NOT COINCIDE WITH SCHOOL DISTRICT BOUNDARIES.

ysis of the data indicates that — on the average — most of the state's education dollars are spent at the school site and not on central bureaucracy.

Each school district maintains its spending data using the same accounting codes and then reports to the state. This is public information, and many school districts make a special effort to present it in a way that is easy for staff and the community to understand. A new accounting code system being introduced in 1997-98 will improve the way many districts present expenditure and revenue information.

Desegregation funds for some districts

SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN CALIFORNIA RECEIVED OVER $600 MILLION FROM THE STATE IN 1997-98 FOR COURT-ORDERED AND VOLUNTARY SCHOOL DESEGREGATION. EACH DISTRICT RECEIVING THESE FUNDS HAS ITS OWN PROGRAMS FOR IMPROVING THE RACIAL INTEGRATION OF ITS SCHOOLS. PARTICIPATING DISTRICTS — INCLUDING CALIFORNIA'S SIX LARGEST SCHOOL DISTRICTS — ARE MOSTLY LOCATED IN URBAN AND SUBURBAN AREAS.

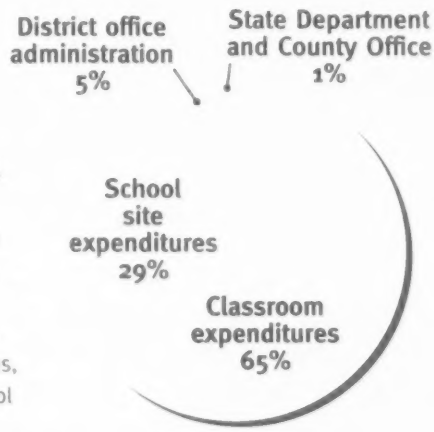
THE DISTRICTS THAT RECEIVED THE MOST DESEGREGATION FUNDING IN 1997-98 INCLUDED LOS ANGELES, SAN DIEGO, SAN FRANCISCO, SAN JOSE, AND SAN BERNARDINO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICTS.

HOW CALIFORNIA'S EDUCATION DOLLARS ARE SPENT

Based on statewide expenditures per student, California's public schools — on average — spent their funds as follows in 1994-95:

Classroom Expenditures: includes classroom teachers, instructional aides, pupil support personnel (such as counselors, psychologists, and nurses), and books, supplies, and equipment.

Other School Site Expenditures: includes school site leadership (principal, vice principal, school secretary), instructional support personnel (curriculum, library, media, and clerical), buildings (utilities and maintenance), food, and transportation.


District office administration 5%
State Department and County Office 1%
School site expenditures 29%
Classroom expenditures 65%

District Office Administration: the share of funding for the average school that went to support district-level administration. This could include business operations, superintendents, assistants, school board operations, district-level communications, and staff development.

State Department and County Office: the share of funding for the average school that went to support county oversight functions and the California Department of Education.

NOTE: Because these percentages include state and county expenditures, they are not directly comparable to a school district's budget.

Data: California Department of Education

EdSource 1998

CAPITAL FUNDS AND THE NEED TO INVEST IN SCHOOL BUILDINGS

School facility issues in California are reaching crisis proportions. A growing student population and a new statewide initiative to reduce class size have led to a serious need for more classrooms and more schools. In addition, many existing schools have deteriorated due to age and inattention to maintenance needs.

California needs to expand and improve its school facilities

More than 1 million additional students are expected to enroll in the state's public schools between 1996 and 2006, for a projected total of 6.4 million students by 2006. The California Department of Education estimates that the state will need $46 billion to maintain and expand its school facilities from 1997 to 2007. Along with providing for anticipated enrollment growth and the need to upgrade aging facilities, this estimate accounts for the new classrooms necessary to reduce class sizes in kindergarten through third grade.

In the first year of the class-size reduction program, California committed $200 million to help school districts create new class space and put more portable classrooms on school sites. This fell far short of the additional facility costs created by the program, funding only 8,000 of 14,000 requests. To get the funding offered for class-size reduction, school districts with buildings already at capacity often found themselves paying for portable classrooms by taking funds that had been intended for other uses. They also converted libraries, science rooms, computer labs, and on-site day care facilities into classrooms. Some began considering the option of year-round education as well.

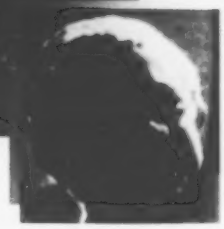
Over half the schools in California are more than 30 years old. As a result, many need basic repairs like roof replacements, plumbing, and safety improvements. Further exacerbating the problem, declines in general school funding over the last 20 years led many districts to defer preventive maintenance expenses in order to maintain education programs. As a result, some school district facilities now need relatively expensive work to stay open.

In addition to concerns about the physical safety of students and staff, the condition of schools and classrooms may affect learning. Certainly the physical condition of a school — just like that of a workplace — affects the quality of the teaching and learning environment, and the overall atmosphere and sense of order.

Experts Say

"SCHOOL BUILDINGS ARE A TOOL IN THE ENTERPRISE CALLED LEARNING AND, LIKE ANY TOOL, THEY CAN HELP OR HURT THAT ENTERPRISE. WE CAN'T CONTROL ALL THE INFLUENCES THAT AFFECT A CHILD'S LEARNING. WE MUST TAKE EACH CHILD AS HE OR SHE COMES TO US. BUT WE CAN CONTROL THE KINDS OF LEARNING FACILITIES TO WHICH WE SEND OUR YOUNG."

DENA G. STONER
DESIGNING SCHOOL FACILITIES FOR LEARNING
NATIONAL EDUCATION KNOWLEDGE INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION



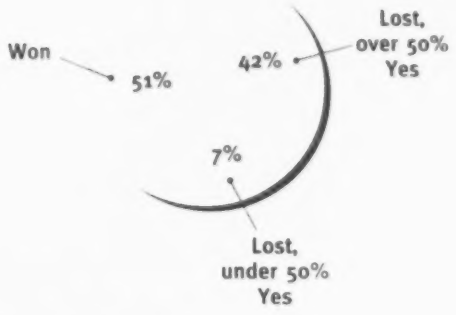
The age and condition of facilities also limit many schools' ability to improve classroom technology. In a classroom built with a single electrical outlet, providing adequate wiring for today's technology can cost thousands of dollars.

Options for paying for facilities

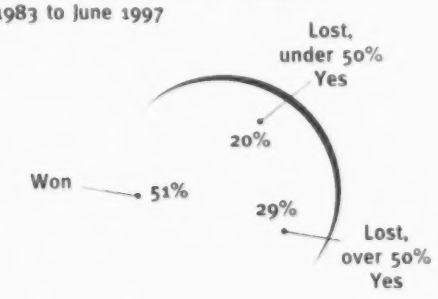
The most common way for California to provide funds for school facilities has been through state bond measures. In effect, the state asks voters to approve borrowing funds to pay for a large capital investment — much as a person borrows to purchase or remodel a home. A simple majority of voters must approve a state bond, which is repaid by state taxes and has no impact on property tax rates. Only one such measure has failed in California in the last 15 years. Nonetheless, the need for new school construction still far exceeds the billions of dollars voters have approved. The proceeds from state bonds are allotted to districts by the State Allocation Board based on the severity of overcrowding and other criteria.

RESULTS OF LOCAL SCHOOL BOND ELECTIONS IN CALIFORNIA

Results of 527 general obligation bond elections: 1986 to June 1997



Results of 55 Mello-Roos elections: 1983 to June 1997



Data: EdSource and School Services of California, Inc. EdSource 1998

Increasingly, school districts are going to their local communities to ask for more facility funding through local bond elections. A school district can ask voters to approve a General Obligation Bond, which taxes all property owners, or a Mello-Roos District, which taxes only a portion of the school district. When a community passes either type of bond, it agrees to pay more property taxes in order to improve or build more school facilities. Such measures require two-thirds voter approval.

From 1994 to 1996, a total of 139 school districts succeeded in getting the two-thirds voter approval necessary for bond passage, out of 246 districts that put measures on the ballot. Local bonds provide a number of important advantages to school districts. The

district controls the amount of bond revenues. They receive the interest on those revenues (under strict guidelines). And they control how the funds are spent, again within certain parameters established by state law. In addition, having local dollars enables a district to qualify more readily for state bond money because it can match the state contribution.

In his 1997-98 budget, Governor Wilson proposed making such local matching mandatory. At the same time, he advocated making it easier for school districts to pass local measures by reducing the requirement from two-thirds to majority voter approval. This would require a constitutional amendment that must be voted on by all Californians.

School districts also can levy fees on local developers and homeowners undertaking residential and commercial construction. This approach assumes that such construction leads to an increase in the number of students local schools must serve. The maximum rates are set by the state and adjusted every two years.

Year-round education can help solve space problems

As an alternative to new buildings, some districts choose to go to a year-round schedule. This can increase school facility capacity by as much as 25% at a lower cost than new buildings.

The state provides incentive payments to school districts that do this, as long as they meet certain criteria. Those include the severity of overcrowding, the amount of overcrowding that would be alleviated by a year-round multi-track schedule, and the school district's eligibility for state funds for new construction.

During the 1995-96 school year, nearly 20% of California's students attended schools with year-round calendars. Some observers expect this percentage to increase as more school districts turn to year-round schedules to handle the growth in the number of classrooms needed as a result of the state's class-size reduction program. This dramatic change from the traditional school calendar directly affects both staff and families and is not always initially popular. Districts that have taken this route report that it requires careful planning and a high level of local dialogue and support to be effective.

How year-round education increases schools' capacity

UNDER A YEAR-ROUND SYSTEM, THE TRADITIONAL NINE-MONTH SCHOOL YEAR WITH A THREE-MONTH BREAK IS REPLACED WITH A 12-MONTH SCHOOL YEAR THAT HAS SHORTER, MORE FREQUENT BREAKS.

IN A TYPICAL ARRANGEMENT, THE STUDENTS AND TEACHERS ARE DIVIDED INTO FOUR GROUPS. WHEN THREE GROUPS ARE IN SCHOOL, ONE IS ON VACATION. THE GROUPS ROTATE "ON AND OFF TRACK" ALL YEAR, SO JUST THREE-FOURTHS OF THE SCHOOL POPULATION IS PRESENT AT ANY TIME. STUDENTS ATTEND SCHOOL THE SAME NUMBER OF DAYS AS THOSE ON A TRADITIONAL SCHEDULE, BUT INSTEAD OF ONE THREE-MONTH SUMMER VACATION, THEY GET SEVERAL VACATIONS THAT ARE SHORTER.

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS, OFFICE STAFF, SERVICE PERSONNEL LIKE CUSTODIANS, AND SOME SPECIALIZED TEACHERS WORK ALL 12 MONTHS.

ISSUES AND TRENDS

TOUGH QUESTIONS ABOUT SCHOOL FUNDIN

- Are Californians' expectations for student achievement and school performance consistent with our willingness to invest in public schools?
- Can and should California bring per student funding up to the national average?
- Are Californians willing to lower the two-thirds vote requirement for school bond and parcel tax elections to give local communities greater flexibility in school funding?
- What should the state do to ensure the equal access to education guaranteed in the California constitution, particularly if local districts gain greater revenue-raising authority?
- How can funding be used to create incentives for school reform without damaging ongoing operations?

CONTINUING GROWTH IN CALIFORNIA'S STUDENT POPULATION

Californians tend to look at the amount of school funding in two different ways. Those who must manage school budgets and implement educational programs focus on the amount available to serve each student, which is well below the national average. Those more concerned about other state-funded programs tend to focus on how the total bill for public education in California has grown.

One dynamic at work — over which the state has limited control — is the continuing growth in the number of students who attend public school in California. From 1986 to 1997, the school-age population in California grew 28%, and the rate of growth remains high. This growth is the result of both a relatively high birth rate and continuing migration into the state from other countries and other parts of the United States. Projections indicate about 6.4 million children will attend California public schools by 2005-06. California's contentious debate on immigration — both legal and illegal — has been partly in response to the pressure such growth is putting on public schools and the state's ability to fund them.

Simply financing the education of California's growing student population will be a major challenge. Is it also possible to bring per-student funding up to the national average? Most Californians believe schools need more funding, but are they willing to take such measures as paying higher taxes or cutting funds for other programs to get it? Could a basic restructuring of the school finance system provide additional funds in some more acceptable way? With school facilities inadequate in California now, the challenge of housing these additional students is also formidable.

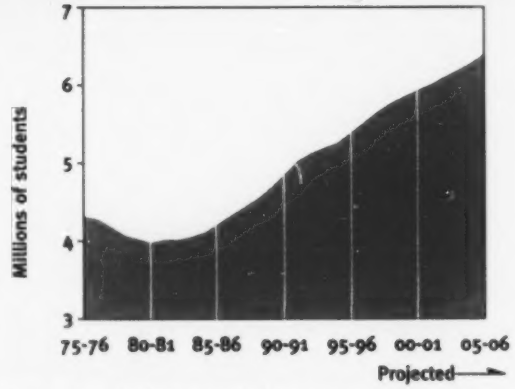
INCREASING LOCAL CAPACITY TO RAISE SCHOOL REVENUES

For many people, part of the solution to the "school finance dilemma" in California would be to increase the ability of local school districts to generate their own revenues.

Indeed, those school districts that have been able to pass local revenue measures find themselves in a fortunate position. They have more money, plus control over how those additional funds are spent. They also have something less tangible, a new or renewed community commitment to schools. Many observers see the loss of that local connection and "sense of ownership" as the highest price California has paid for centralizing control of school revenues at the state level.

But greater flexibility in raising local revenues introduces serious issues about the equity of school funding and opportunity. The problem is that wealthier communities can provide increased local support with much less effort than poorer areas. Along with the ethical questions, the *Serrano* v. *Priest* court decision in California and many subsequent cases in other states say that such inequities are illegal. One remedy is power equalization: the state equalizes funding by taking some revenues from school districts with higher revenues to subsidize those with fewer resources.

ENROLLMENT CONTINUES TO GROW



In one decade (1985-1995) the number of students in California's public schools grew by almost 1.2 million, more students than the entire school enrollment of state of New Jersey in 1995. That growth rate is projected to continue.

Data: California Department of Finance

EdSource 1998

Experts Say

"When the state wants to build a highway, it plans a design, accepts bids from contractors, and then moves ahead with construction once enough funding is available. The cost depends on the product. ...

"But when it comes to education, the process is reversed. The state starts with an allocation and then tries to determine how much and what kind of education that will buy."

Dollars and Sense: A Simple Approach to School Finance
Little Hoover Commission

QUESTIONS OF ADEQUACY AND EQUITY ARE SELDOM ADDRESSED

Each year in Sacramento the school funding debate centers on how to allocate available funds to schools. Seldom if ever does anyone ask: How much is enough?

Often, advocates of more educational spending point to California's low relative national ranking in per-pupil expenditures as proof that its public schools need more money. On the other hand, opponents point to examples of wasteful school spending and to studies indicating that money makes no difference if the system isn't functioning properly to begin with.

When Californians talk about ways to improve schools, they also look in both directions. Some improvements — such as smaller class sizes and promoting the use of technology — require a financial investment. Others — such as raising standards and improving the quality of teacher preparation — may not.

So does money matter? There may never be an unequivocal answer to that question. The more important questions may be: What constitutes a good public school and how much would it cost? And how can equity of educational opportunity be achieved for California's diverse student population? While those questions are certainly appropriate for state-level policymakers to ponder, they can also provide perspective for local school districts and communities as they decide how to allocate the funds they receive.

WAYS TO GET INVOLVED

ACTIONS TO TAKE

Understand how money is spent in local schools; ask good questions

At your school: School principals usually are responsible for their school site budget, but the amount of discretion they have varies greatly.

Parents, teachers, and staff need to understand which spending decisions are made at the site level and which are controlled by the school district.

School site council members should expect to see the school budget and make sure they understand both the legal requirements and local decision-making process for special program expenditures. They can also help ensure that spending decisions reflect school priorities.

In your school district: Every parent, educator, businessperson, and resident has the right to examine most school district financial records (with some exceptions such as payroll records). These are public documents.

School officials and school boards can help make sure public inquiry and involvement in school budgeting create a positive outcome. They should make sure financial data are easy to get and easy to understand, and they should respond to questions as quickly, clearly, and honestly as they can.

If your district has a budget advisory committee, serving on it can provide you with important insights and understanding. Members of such committees need to ask hard questions and request reasonable data to put spending decisions in context. When looking at school financial data, first try to understand the constraints of school district budgeting and the rationale for budget decision making in your district. Look at expenditures for various budget categories (salaries, utilities, etc.) and how they've changed over time. Understanding what is "typical" for similar schools and districts can help outside reviewers judge whether an expenditure seems out of line or perfectly normal.

Union leaders have a particular obligation to understand fully the funding mechanisms, pressures, and long-term projections for school revenues when making their case for a new contract through the collective bargaining process.

"Schools need **more** *money."*

"Schools should just **manage their resources** *better."*

"Teachers deserve a **pay raise.**"

"How will we **pay** *for computers?"*

Be aware of how statewide and federal funding decisions affect local schools

In your local school and district: Become familiar with how your school district gets its funding. What is your district's revenue limit? What percentage of your funding comes from categorical programs, and how much money is it? Do your schools need additional programs that your district simply can't afford to provide?

In California as a whole: Stay informed about state and federal decisions about school funding, as well as ballot measures and bond elections that have an impact on public schools in California. Get the facts, understand the issues, and vote.

An improved California economy guarantees, through Proposition 98, that more funds will come to education. How do you think the additional funds should be allocated? Are you supportive or concerned about earmarking school district funds for special programs like class-size reduction? Are there other programs you believe deserve a high priority? Do you think your local school district or school site should have greater discretion over its budget? Californians need to discuss these questions, whether on local editorial pages, at community meetings, on-line, or at local schools.

In Sacramento: Let your state legislators and the Governor know your general concerns and priorities. Contact them to explain how their decisions affect the schools and students you care about. (You can find out who represents you by calling your local Registrar of Voters.)

And there's nothing like the personal touch. If your school district or organization sponsors an annual legislative visit, go with them to Sacramento. Closer to home, take advantage of "town hall meetings" and other gatherings organized by your elected representatives. Your participation is a chance to both get your opinions heard and make it clear that education is an issue that matters.

Don't ignore facilities

In your school district: Are your school facilities adequate and properly maintained? Do they need to be upgraded for technology?

If facilities are an issue, educators need to explain the situation to their communities and ask for help. They can work with the community to encourage local work events to do clean-up, painting, and landscaping.

Maintenance employees can support such volunteerism and protect their job rights by being willing to work with the community and provide qualified supervision for such events.

Parents and other community members can become informed about the facility situation and participate on task forces to investigate options, including local bond measures. They also can help the rest of the community understand that quality school facilities are an important community asset and a shared responsibility.

In California as a whole: State laws and regulations govern many aspects of school construction and have an effect on the cost of schools. State policymakers can assess those laws and procedures to make sure they are as efficient and effective as possible.

Local educators and community members can make sure their representatives know the impact of the laws and regulations on building schedules and costs.

Business and labor leaders can take into consideration the need to support and assist public education when they fashion their advocacy efforts in this area.

Help support local schools directly

At your school: Virtually every school in California conducts fundraising and uses the money raised to either take care of the basics or enhance school programs. Educators should be clear with parents and community members about the help they need, and they should make sure to provide well-organized volunteer opportunities.

Parents and community members can all find ways to help — from supporting fundraisers to volunteering at school once in a while to taking on leadership responsibilities in the school parent-teacher organization.

In your school district: Parents and business people concerned about school funding can help start or support a school district education foundation. They also can volunteer to help with school district bond or parcel tax campaigns.

In your community: Non-monetary efforts — including in-kind donations, specialized technical assistance, and volunteer time — are highly valued at almost every California public school. Successful school-business partnerships abound throughout the state, so plenty of models are avail-

"*We're* **out of space.** *How will we* **reduce** *class sizes?*"

"*Why* **can't families pay** *for school supplies?*"

"Why does **their** *school district have* **so much** *money?"*

"How will we **fix** *the plumbing?"*

able. A strength and an appropriate focus of these efforts can be the commitment to help all students in a community, including school sites with fewer financial and volunteer resources.

Begin asking "How much funding is enough?"

Throughout California, school leaders, policymakers, parents, and other community representatives can begin serious conversations about this question. What do we want out of our public school system? What services to students are the minimum necessary to make that expectation possible? What would an optimum level of school operation look like? How much would it cost? If we can't have it all, what are the highest priorities? Are current expenditures efficient, responsible, and in line with this vision? What can we do to make sure every education dollar is spent wisely and with student achievement as the bottom line?

WHERE TO GO FOR ANSWERS

School principals can explain how funds are spent at their school and what discretion the district allows over expenditures. They can also tell you how much extra revenue the school receives from parent and community contributions and from special grants.

District administrators can explain the details of the current budget and tell you about the decision-making process. This is all public information.

The local school board approves all district expenditures and the budget. Gathering public input is part of the board's responsibility and public hearings on the school district budget are part of the legally required approval process.

State legislators and the Governor wield great power over school finance, including both revenues and expenditures. In their capacity as elected officials, they act on the basis of their understanding of the public will and political realities.

U.S. senators and congressional representatives have influence over about 8% of California's school funding and over regulations on how states qualify for those funds. The largest federal programs include Special Education, Child Nutrition (school lunches), and Title I support for disadvantaged students.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ...

School Funding

Designing School Facilities For Learning
National Educations Knowledge Industry Association

A national examination of issues related to school facilities, including both the inadequacies and visions about how buildings can become tools to improve learning. PROBE: Developing Education Policy Issues, 1997

Thomas Ross
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Attn: Publications Department
730 Harrison Street
San Francisco, CA 94107-1242
415/565-3044
fax: 415/565-3012
www.wested.org

Dollars and Sense: A Simple Approach to School Finance

This report by the Commission on California State Government Organization and Economy identifies problems and makes recommendations for a sweeping revision of the way California pays for public education. 1997

Little Hoover Commission
660 J Street, Suite 260
Sacramento, CA 95814
916/445-2125
fax: 916/322-7709

Making Schools Work: Improving Performance and Controlling Costs
Eric Hanushek

The culmination of extensive discussion among a panel of economists, this book argues that school improvement depends on the more efficient use of existing resources rather than the provision of added funds. Brookings Institution, 1994

Maximizing School Board Leadership: Finance

Part of a training curriculum and publication series, this material discusses the school board's role in school finance and decision making, and provides suggestions for how to work effectively with local school personnel in this area. 1996

California School Boards Association
3100 Beacon Boulevard
P.O. Box 1660
West Sacramento, CA 95691
916/371-4691
fax: 916/371-3407
www.csba.org

Revenues and Limits
Paul Goldfinger

Updated annually, this publication provides experienced and new school finance practitioners with information on current budget issues in California, ideas for school finance implementation, and analyses of current and future trends.

School Services Corporation of California, Inc.
1121 L Street, Suite 1060
Sacramento, CA 95814
916/446-7517
fax: 916/446-2011
www.sscal.com

Education Data Partnership

This Web site provides financial and demographic information about all California school districts, with national and statewide comparisons on enrollments, expenditures, and pupil-teacher ratios.

www.ed-data.k12.ca.us

Current Data and Reports

The following organizations issue reports, data, and special analyses about school finance on a regular basis.

National Education Association
NEA Professional Library
P.O. Box 509
West Haven, CT 06516
800/229-4200

National Center for Education Statistics
U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research & Improvement
National Library of Education
555 New Jersey Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20208-5721
800/424-1616
www.ed.gov/NCES/

California Office of the Legislative Analyst
925 L Street, Suite 1000
Sacramento, CA 95814
916/445-2375
www.lao.ca.gov

California Department of Education
Bureau of Publications, Sales Unit
P.O. Box 271
Sacramento, CA 95812-0271
800/995-4099 or
916/445-1260
fax: 916/323-0823
www.cde.ca.gov

EdSource Reports

California's K-12 School Finance System

This booklet provides a succinct description of how California's education funding system works, including dozens of charts and graphs. 1995

Glossary of School Finance Terms

This reference provides clear definitions of terms commonly used in discussions of K-12 school finance in California. 1996

How California Compares

This brief compares California's public education system with those of other states, looking at similarities and differences in the children served, school funding, teachers, and school improvement efforts. 1995

Long-Term Funding for California Schools

This report takes a tough look at how California's public schools are funded, and explores options for paying for education in a way that advances its effectiveness, encourages financial efficiency, and ensures equity for students. 1995

School Finance 1997-98 (updated annually)

EdSource's annual fall report analyzes the impact of legislation and funding on the state's school system.

Selected Readings on California School Finance (updated annually)

This spiral-bound collection of key EdSource publications provides a comprehensive overview for understanding school finance in California.

Special Education Funding: The Other School Finance System

This report provides an overview of the special education system's policies and issues, and explores their implications for all California children. 1995

Understanding School Budgets – As Simple as 1,2,3

This guide is vital for understanding school district budgets and the budget development process. The new edition features information on site-based budgets and California's new accounting codes. 1996

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Suite 100
Palo Alto, CA 94303-4743
650/857-9604
fax: 650/857-9618
www.edsource.org

IF YOU'RE WONDERING

How do we know if we're getting what we're paying for in terms of student learning?
— turn to Student Performance, Section C.

What are the most effective kinds of investments for improving school performance?
— turn to Teaching and Instruction, Section D.

Who decides how school funds get spent?
— turn to The System, Section F.

Can and should we use financial rewards and penalties to improve schools?
— turn to The System, Section F.

NOTES ... QUESTIONS ... IDEAS ...

NOTES ... QUESTIONS ... IDEAS ...

The System

ROLES, OVERSIGHT, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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ABOUT THIS SECTION

FOCAL POINTS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Focusing on the potential impact of all major new initiatives on student learning.
- Building accountability and evaluation into every new and existing school program.
- Re-examining the role of teacher unions in school improvement and professionalization of the field.
- Finding the right balance between local, district, and state-level decision making and control.
- Ensuring that California's elected officials understand the priorities of the public, the recommendations of reformers, the trade-offs of various policy choices, and how these all affect students and student achievement.
- Deciding on incentives and consequences to encourage schools to improve student achievement.

Governance of schools in California is complicated, ambiguous, and often conflicting. The people and groups who set the policies and regulations for public education are many in number and diverse in perspective. And while it would be most effective if all of them were pointing in the same direction, they often are not.

School governance decisions are made everywhere from the Governor's office to the local elementary school. The Legislature and Governor form a powerful policy group through their control of the state budget and legislative process. The State Superintendent of Public Instruction and the State Board of Education form another layer. And some policies have been mandated by state and federal courts. The actions of County Superintendents of Schools and their boards can especially affect small school districts. Local school boards — along with school district superintendents — set local education policy and see that state and federal requirements are carried out. School principals and entities such as school site councils also exercise some policy authority. Finally, employee unions through their collective bargaining agreements form another layer of authority and influence.

These decision makers have the strongest voices when priorities are set and financial decisions are made about California's schools. Yet all of them serve — and are ultimately accountable to — the parents and other community members who pay the taxes that make it possible for public education to exist.

Increasingly, community members are demanding greater accountability and clearer measures of performance from public education. In fact, as California nears the end of the century, accountability has taken center stage in the state's conversation about school improvement. But can all the various levels of governance agree on some fair and accurate measures of school and student success? And if they do agree, can Californians then use accountability methods, such as incentive systems, sanctions, and school choice, to help schools improve the performance of their schools and students?

Mount Shasta

IN CALIFORNIA TODAY

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT?

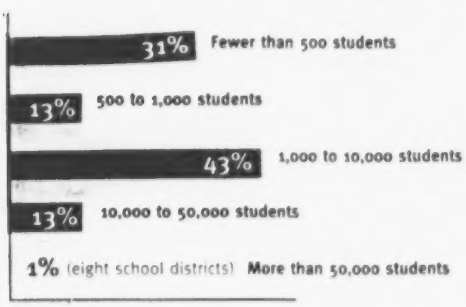
As is true in most of the United States, California's governance of schools is based on a long and at times almost untouchable tradition of local control of schools. Both the federal and state governments have had, according to this tradition, only limited roles in deciding how schools should be run and how children should be taught. The basic "unit of governance" for such decisions in California has been the local school district governing board.

The following sections describe the fundamental legal responsibilities of each sector of government for K-12 education.

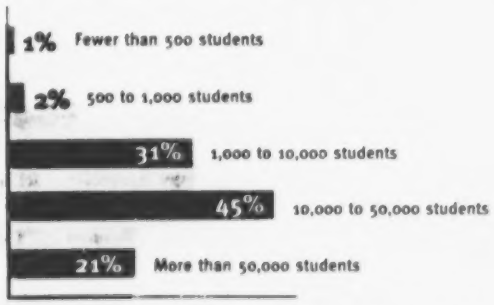
MANY VERY SMALL SCHOOL DISTRICTS, A FEW VERY LARGE ONES

- The public education system in California serves about 5.8 million students — one out of every eight school-age children in the United States.
- These children are taught in 994 school districts that vary dramatically in size, from Blake Elementary School District with nine students, to Los Angeles Unified, which enrolls almost 650,000.
- The types of school district configurations are unified districts, which encompass all grades from kindergarten to 12th; elementary districts, which serve grades K-8 or occasionally K-6; and high school districts, which serve grades 9-12.

SCHOOL DISTRICTS BY SIZE IN CALIFORNIA


31% Fewer than 500 students
13% 500 to 1,000 students
43% 1,000 to 10,000 students
13% 10,000 to 50,000 students
1% (eight school districts) More than 50,000 students

DISTRIBUTION OF STUDENTS BY SCHOOL DISTRICT SIZE IN CALIFORNIA


1% Fewer than 500 students
2% 500 to 1,000 students
31% 1,000 to 10,000 students
45% 10,000 to 50,000 students
21% More than 50,000 students

The range of school district size in California is dramatic, adding a complicating factor to any statewide policy decisions. While nearly a third of the state's 994 school districts have 500 or fewer students, over 20% of its students attend schools in the eight largest districts.

Data: California Department of Education

EdSource 1998

Federal law governs the provision of Special Education services

FEDERAL LAW* REQUIRES SCHOOLS TO SATISFY THREE BASIC PRINCIPLES IN PROVIDING SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES TO CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES.

- ALL CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES MUST BE PROVIDED A FREE, APPROPRIATE PUBLIC EDUCATION.
- EACH CHILD'S EDUCATION MUST BE DETERMINED ON AN INDIVIDUAL BASIS AND DESIGNED TO MEET HIS OR HER UNIQUE NEEDS IN THE LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT.
- THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES MUST BE ENSURED AND PROTECTED THROUGH PROCEDURAL SAFEGUARDS (DUE PROCESS).

* *THE ORIGINAL STATUTE WAS PL 94-142. THE PROGRAM IS NOW MOST COMMONLY REFERRED TO AS IDEA, THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT.*

FEDERAL

The federal government exercises limited control over K-12 education through funding for categorical programs, some of which are required by federal law or court decisions.

The official mission of the U.S. Department of Education is "to ensure equal access to education and to promote educational excellence throughout the nation." While the President and others in the federal government can heighten public attention on education as an important national interest, responsibility for public schools lies with the states and much of the control of the schools with the local community.

In that context, the federal government has relatively little legal authority or direct influence over K-12 education in California. It provides only about 8% of the state's education funding, all in categorical programs. These include Special Education, child nutrition (school lunches and breakfasts), and Title I, which provides funds for educationally disadvantaged students, including the children of migrant workers. A few federal programs, like Goals 2000, provide a limited amount of incentive funding to encourage school improvement.

In recent years, as a result of America's poor showing on some international student achievement tests, interest in the development of national standards and tests has grown. Even if it were voluntary, such a test could change the amount of influence the federal government exerts over California schools. (See the Student Performance section.)

STATE

State-level leadership of K-12 education in California is divided among state lawmakers, the Governor's office, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the State Board of Education.

The Governor, State Legislature, and Education Code

The state government in California has a great deal of power over K-12 education because of its control over education funding (see the School Funding section). Beyond the budget, the Governor and Legislature can make laws that strongly influence every facet of school operations.

California governs its K-12 public schools through the California Education Code, which contains all the laws directly related to public education. Ed Code sections are developed or changed by the Governor and Legislature when they make laws. Local school boards and county offices are responsible for complying with all these provisions. School districts and county offices usually have copies of the entire Education Code in their offices.

In addition, school districts, as public entities and public employers, must comply with various requirements of the state's Labor and Government Codes. These cover such issues as employee collective bargaining and due process rights, as well as the state's open meeting law (commonly known as the Brown Act).

When Governor Pete Wilson first took office in 1990, he put greater focus on his office's role in education policy and leadership by attempting to create a new cabinet level position. The Secretary for Child Development and Education, while never officially approved by the Legislature as a cabinet position, nonetheless has served to raise the profile of the Governor's office on education issues.

THE LAW SAYS

CALIFORNIA EDUCATION CODE TABLE OF CONTENTS

Following are the major sections in the California Education Code that pertain to K-12 education. The Code is permissive, which means that school districts are free to take any action not specifically prohibited.

General Education Code Provisions

- General Provisions
- County Educational Agencies
- County Administration of District Organization
- Elections
- Public School Personnel
- Education Programs — State Master Plans
- Joint Programs, Services, and Powers (Counties, school districts, and higher education)
- Participation in Federal Programs and Interstate Agreements
- Finance
- School Bonds
- Foundations and State Committees and Commissions
- State Teachers' Retirement System
- Libraries
- Miscellaneous

Elementary and Secondary Education

- State Administration/State Educational Agencies
- Local Administration
  - Local Educational Agencies
  - School Operations
  - School Facilities
  - School Finance
  - Employees
- Instruction and Services
  - Attendance for Computing Apportionments
  - Charter Schools
  - Pupils
  - General Instructional Programs
  - Programs for Disadvantaged Pupils
  - Special Education Programs
  - Experimental School Programs
  - State Special Schools and Centers
  - Instructional Materials and Testing
  - Use of Categorical Funds
  - Consolidated Application Process
  - Categorical Funding

EdSource 1998

The Law Says

CITIZENS AS POLICYMAKERS

CALIFORNIA PROVIDES ITS CITIZENS WITH THE ABILITY TO AMEND THE CONSTITUTION AND MAKE LAWS THROUGH THE BALLOT INITIATIVE PROCESS. BY SECURING ENOUGH VOTER SIGNATURES, ANY CALIFORNIA CITIZEN CAN PUT A MEASURE TO A PUBLIC VOTE ON THE STATE BALLOT.

THESE INITIATIVES HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO PROFOUNDLY IMPACT PUBLIC EDUCATION. A FEW PAST EXAMPLES INCLUDE PROPOSITION 13, WHICH LIMITED PROPERTY TAXES; PROPOSITION 98, WHICH SET A MINIMUM LEVEL OF SCHOOL FUNDING; AND PROPOSITION 174, WHICH — IF IT HAD PASSED — WOULD HAVE INSTITUTED A VOUCHER SYSTEM THAT AUTHORIZED THE USE OF PUBLIC FUNDS TO SEND CHILDREN TO PRIVATE AND RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS.

SUPPORTERS OF THE INITIATIVE PROCESS POINT TO IT AS A TRULY DEMOCRATIC MECHANISM BY WHICH THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE DIRECTLY AFFECTS GOVERNMENT AND LAW. DETRACTORS SAY THE PROCESS HAS LED TO UNDUE INFLUENCE BY GROUPS THAT CAN PAY FOR SIGNATURE-GATHERING AND THE PASSAGE OF LAWS THAT WERE BADLY WRITTEN OR ILL-CONCEIVED.

An appointed State Board of Education

California's 11-member State Board of Education (SBE) is appointed by the Governor, with the approval of the State Senate. The SBE is the governing body for the California Department of Education (CDE). This body's influence, responsibilities, and budget have grown in recent years. Among other things, the SBE is responsible for approving curriculum frameworks, textbooks, statewide assessments and standards for student performance. It acts as a court of appeals for various local decisions, including those related to school district organization. It also approves regulations drafted by the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) to implement new laws.

An elected Superintendent of Public Instruction

The California constitution requires that the voters in the state elect an SPI. This nonpartisan position has at times been highly political. The SPI's major responsibility is to administer the day-to-day operation of the CDE under the policies of the SBE. The CDE's work includes administering and enforcing state education laws; advising school districts on legal, financial, and program matters; and collecting, analyzing, and disseminating financial, demographic, and other data about public education.

SCHOOL DISTRICT

School district-level leaders are responsible for governing and managing local schools within the limits of state and federal law.

California state law mandates that every school district have a publicly elected governing board. Depending on the size and configuration of the district, the school board has three, five, or seven members who must be residents of the school district. In some larger districts, school board members are elected by geographic region.

Together with the school district administration, the governing board is responsible for many fiscal, personnel, instructional, and student-related policy decisions. In addition to providing direction for the district, the governing board's responsibilities include:

- hiring and firing the superintendent, and approving the superintendent's personnel recommendations
- adopting a balanced annual budget and interim financial reports
- reviewing and approving school expenditures
- adopting school district policies
- approving curriculum material selections
- making a final ruling on student expulsions
- adopting the school calendar
- negotiating contracts with employee unions
- closing and constructing schools
- assigning students through attendance boundaries or other means
- implementing state laws

ROLE OF CALIFORNIA'S SCHOOL BOARDS

In 1996 the California School Board Association launched its *Maximizing School Board Leadership* project, which was designed to give school district governance teams the tools to keep all district efforts focused on student learning. The project describes four major roles for school boards.

1. **Establishing a vision for the community's schools** that reflects the consensus of the school board, community, and district staff, and sets a direction for the school district, driving every aspect of the district's program.
2. **Maintaining an effective and efficient organizational structure** that supports the district's vision and empowers the professional staff. The board does not implement policies or programs, but is responsible for employing and supporting the superintendent; setting policy for hiring other personnel; overseeing the development of, adopting, and supporting curriculum, policies, the budget, and facility decisions; and providing direction for and voting to accept collective bargaining agreements.
3. **Ensuring accountability** to the public for the performance of its schools. To do so, the board is responsible for evaluating the superintendent; monitoring, reviewing, and revising policies; serving as a judicial and appeals board; monitoring student achievement and program effectiveness; requiring program change as needed; monitoring and adjusting district finances; and monitoring the collective bargaining process.
4. **Providing community leadership** by involving the community in meaningful ways in setting a direction for the district, communicating clearly about district issues, and advocating for their students, their districts' educational programs, and public education.

EdSource 1998

Definitions

CERTIFICATED EMPLOYEE

ANY SCHOOL EMPLOYEE WHO HOLDS A TEACHING CREDENTIAL, INCLUDING CLASSROOM TEACHERS, SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AND OTHER ADMINISTRATORS, SPECIALISTS, AND SOME PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT STAFF SUCH AS SCHOOL LIBRARIANS AND SCHOOL COUNSELORS.

CLASSIFIED EMPLOYEE

ANYONE EMPLOYED BY A SCHOOL DISTRICT WHO DOES NOT HAVE A TEACHING CREDENTIAL, INCLUDING BUSINESS OFFICE STAFF, MAINTENANCE WORKERS, AND SECURITY GUARDS, PLUS EVERYONE FROM SCHOOL SECRETARIES TO INSTRUCTIONAL ASSISTANTS TO CUSTODIANS AT THE SCHOOL SITE.

EMPLOYEE UNIONS

The California Government Code gives teachers and most other school employees the right to be represented by a union and to engage in collective bargaining on matters related to working conditions and compensation.

In all but a few school districts, teachers and most other non-management employees exercise these rights. Though still rare, administrators in some school districts also have chosen to be represented by a union.

Given that more than 80% of school district expenditures are for employee compensation, the collective bargaining process can have considerable impact on the school district budget through negotiations related to salaries and benefits. Perhaps less obvious is the impact on other facets of school district operation that fall under the category of working conditions. For teachers, these include such things as school calendar, teacher assignments, evaluation procedures, minutes of instructional time, and extra duties outside of direct classroom instruction.

MAJOR EDUCATION UNIONS IN CALIFORNIA

California Teachers Association (CTA), an affiliate of the National Education Association (NEA), is the state's largest representative of certificated K-12 education employees.

California Federation of Teachers (CFT) is the statewide organization of local unions of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). Affiliated with the AFL-CIO, CFT represents educational employees who work at every level of the state's education system from Head Start to the University of California.

United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) represents over 29,000 teachers and support service personnel throughout Los Angeles Unified School District, the second largest school district in the nation.

California School Employees Association (CSEA) represents public school employees statewide. It is the largest independent classified employee union in the United States.

Service Employees International Union (SEIU) is a national labor union that represents some classified employees in public schools.

American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) is a union that counts some classified school employees among its membership of public employees and health care workers in the United States, Panama, and Puerto Rico.

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The collective bargaining agreement is negotiated between the school district as the employer and the union as the legal representative of the employees. The trend toward site-level decision making has challenged unions and school districts alike to examine how much flexibility an individual school should have on issues covered under the collective bargaining agreement. These can include teacher assignments, job descriptions for classified employees, and myriad other issues.

School district officials generally are called upon to negotiate with a number of different bargaining units in a district — as many as seven in a few places. Each unit can have a different contract and separate negotiations.

School Sites

The general trend is toward having individual schools make more decisions, but this is largely at the discretion of the school district.

In a few instances, California state law mandates that school sites have decision-making power, or at least that there be a site-level process for presenting recommendations to the district's governing board for ratification. These include:

- School site councils and other parent-staff councils mandated by categorical programs (School Improvement Program, bilingual, GATE, and Title I), which may recommend specific programs and budget allocations and manage state-required program evaluations.
- Limited provisions for site-determined staff development needs.
- Special one-time grants (as happened in 1996-97) for site-determined expenditures, with approval of the school board.

On their own, many school districts are giving individual schools greater autonomy over how they operate and how children are taught. Often this goes hand-in-hand with increasing collaboration with parents and other community members. Major areas where districts may give discretion to school sites include:

The Law Says

Every school that participates in California's School Improvement Program (SIP) is required to have a **school site council.**

This council must be composed of school employees, including the school principal, teachers, and other school personnel; and parents of the school's students. In high schools students must also be included. Each segment must be selected by its constituent group (teachers by teachers, parents by parents, etc.).

The group must be evenly split between the school employees and the parents or parents and students combined, and the majority of school employees must be teachers.

Charter schools: a new type of school governance

CHARTER SCHOOLS REPRESENT AN EXPERIMENT IN SHIFTING SCHOOL GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT TO THE SCHOOL LEVEL.

CALIFORNIA'S CHARTER SCHOOL LAW, EFFECTIVE IN 1993, ALLOWED 100 SCHOOLS TO OPERATE OUTSIDE BOTH STATE AND SCHOOL DISTRICT GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES. THIS INCLUDES COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AND MOST PROVISIONS OF THE EDUCATION CODE. CHARTER SCHOOLS ARE ACCOUNTABLE FOR MEETING STUDENT PERFORMANCE GOALS THAT THEY HAVE DEFINED AND TO WHICH THEIR SCHOOL BOARD HAS AGREED. SINCE THE 100 SCHOOL CAP WAS REACHED, THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION HAS ASSERTED ITS RIGHT TO WAIVE EDUCATION CODE PROVISIONS IN ORDER TO APPROVE ADDITIONAL CHARTERS. BY MID-1997, MORE THAN 130 SCHOOLS (OUT OF A TOTAL OF MORE THAN 7,000 IN THE STATE) WERE OPERATING AS CHARTER SCHOOLS.

THE IMPACT OF CHARTER SCHOOL STATUS ON STUDENT PERFORMANCE REMAINS A TOPIC OPEN TO QUESTION, SINCE LITTLE DATA IS YET AVAILABLE. THE OFFICE OF THE LEGISLATIVE ANALYST WAS SCHEDULED TO COMPLETE AN INTERIM STUDY OF CHARTER SCHOOLS IN NOVEMBER 1997, WITH A MORE COMPREHENSIVE LOOK SLATED TO FOLLOW BY JANUARY 1999.

- Site-level budgeting, which can be limited to supply budgets, can include every facet of school operations, or can fall somewhere in between. Most sites have at least a small discretionary budget.
- The development of a distinctive school vision or identity and strategic plan, along with some aspects of the instructional program. Magnet schools are probably the pre-eminent example of this, although they are most often instigated by the district rather than the school site itself.
- Special programs outside the regular school day, including parent education, after-school activities for students, and community partnerships.
- The selection of instructional strategies (like grouping practices and teaching methods) and student support programs to meet the needs of a school's specific student body.

COUNTY OFFICES OF EDUCATION

Each of California's 58 counties has its own County Office of Education (COE), which has responsibilities independent from and in service to local school districts. County offices account for less than 1% of school expenditures statewide.

All county offices are operated by a superintendent and board, but the method for selecting the members of the governance team varies by county. In some cases, the County Board of Supervisors appoints both the superintendent and board; in some both are elected by voters; and in five, an elected board selects the COE superintendent. COEs also differ in the role they play and the services they offer, based partly on local practice and partly on the size of the county and its school districts. In the seven counties that have a single school district, the lines between county and school district administration are often blurred.

The responsibilities of the COE include:

- Implementing some mandated statewide programs, such as court schools for juvenile offenders. (The programs vary from county to county.)
- Providing some Special Education programs. In some school districts, Special Education services are available only through the county office.

SOME SPECIAL SITUATIONS

A few specific programs funded as part of K-12 education present special circumstances because of the way they are governed, the students they serve, or both.

JOINT POWERS AGREEMENTS

In order to provide some types of educational services effectively and efficiently, school districts, county offices of education, and city or county governments may enter into a Joint Powers Agreement (JPA).

A JPA creates a separate agency responsible to all the various government entities involved. The governance structure for the agency is part of the agreement. It may include elected board members from the cooperating government entities or appointed representatives. A number of public school programs are routinely governed through JPAs, including such things as employee insurance cooperatives and transportation agencies.

Two notable and common JPAs are for the provision of occupational training and Special Education services.

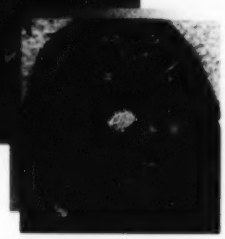
- A total of 70 Regional Occupational Centers/Programs operate statewide. Except in a few particularly large school districts, these programs involve an agreement between several school districts and the local county office of education. They provide work skill training and job-related counseling to students age 16 to 18.
- Special Education is provided through a Special Education Local Planning Area (SELPA). The SELPA boundaries may coincide with school district boundaries, include part of a school district, or comprise several districts. The SELPA administers the funding and services for a variety of programs for students with special needs.

MISCELLANEOUS PROGRAMS

School districts also may receive some funding for programs that largely serve populations other than K-12 students.

- Adult Education serves nearly 2 million adults and high school students. The bulk of the funding is through the local school district, which also manages and governs the program. Fees are assessed to participants in some program offerings.
- Some school districts also participate in Child Development programs for preschoolers from low-income families.

EdSource 1998



Holding state and local elected officials accountable

PEOPLE OFTEN POINT TO "THE STATE" OR "THE DISTRICT" WHEN THEY COMPLAIN ABOUT SOMETHING HAPPENING IN SCHOOLS, AS IF THESE DISTANT ENTITIES ARE BEYOND THEIR REACH. YET IN OUR DEMOCRACY BOTH STATE AND SCHOOL DISTRICT LEADERSHIP INCLUDES ELECTED OFFICIALS WHO ARE VERY MUCH ACCOUNTABLE TO THEIR CONSTITUENTS. VOTERS CAN START BY ASKING ELECTED OFFICIALS FOR THE REASONING BEHIND THEIR DECISIONS. THEY CAN THEN VOICE THEIR AGREEMENT OR DISAGREEMENT BOTH BY COMMUNICATING WITH THEIR ELECTED OFFICIALS AND BY EXPRESSING THEIR OPINIONS AT THE BALLOT BOX.

- Reviewing school district budgets, investigating districts with budgets that are out of balance, and in rare cases taking over district management.
- Providing a variety of other services to school districts, including financial services, staff development workshops, instructional media, and satellite-linked educational broadcasts.

The county office also administers the work of the County Committee on School District Organization. This body, which is elected by local school board members, reviews all requests for changes in school district boundaries and configurations (such as unification), according to a legal procedure specified in the Education Code. Many of its recommendations must go to the SBE for approval and some eventually go to voters.

SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY

Understanding who is responsible for what in K-12 education is only the first step. School decision makers also are accountable for the success of their policies. The effectiveness of most accountability methods is closely tied to all the other major issues discussed in this handbook: curriculum, student performance, teaching and instruction, and funding. But the issue of school accountability deserves to be considered independently because it lies at the heart of the relationship between public schools and the communities they serve.

Many accountability approaches have been tried in the past 100 years. Today, the pendulum appears to be swinging from disciplining schools that do not "do as they're told" to providing incentives designed to encourage schools to improve. Nonetheless, many accountability measures and procedures rooted in past practices remain in place at both the state and local levels.

Ways the state holds schools accountable

In California, many facets of school operation — from the length of the school year, to fiscal oversight and management, to the requirement to communicate with parents — are regulated by state law. This is especially true in the case of Special Education and other categorical programs, which are funded by the state and federal governments and often are mandated by court decisions.

Generally, schools can lose funding if they don't follow the regulations. When the regulations involve students identified as having a disability or other special need, costly legal action by parents is also a constant threat and one that school districts ignore at great financial risk.

On the other hand, many of California's categorical programs — such as mentor teachers, longer school day/year, and staff development funding — use financial incentives to encourage schools and educators to improve. In financially strapped school districts in California, these programs sometimes have provided seed money for changes school officials wanted to make anyway. Other times, districts have committed to providing programs they might not otherwise have chosen, on the theory that money with strings attached is better than no money at all.

While compliance with laws and regulations is important, it is not a measure of how well students are learning. Neither is simple participation in a categorical program. A district can comply with every rule, offer every special program, and still not be educating students well. California historically has done very little to hold schools accountable based on measures of student performance, although momentum toward that type of school accountability is increasing.

Definitions

TENURE

THE STATUS OF PERMANENTLY HOLDING A JOB OR POSITION WITHOUT A REQUIREMENT FOR A PERIODIC, INDIVIDUAL CONTRACT RENEWAL.

DUE PROCESS

A GUARANTEE THAT SET PROCEDURES WILL BE FOLLOWED IN THE CASE OF AN EMPLOYEE DISMISSAL, WITH THE BURDEN ON THE SUPERVISOR TO PROVE THAT EMPLOYMENT OUGHT TO BE DISCONTINUED.

Personal accountability of educators

An oft-cited concern of the public — in particular the business community — is that educators in general and teachers in particular are not held accountable for their own performance. Some critics point to employment protections (such as tenure) and due process rights, which they say protect incompetent teachers. Others say the problem lies more with school administrators who are unwilling or unable to seriously evaluate and discipline ineffective teachers.

In California, the law is very specific regarding teacher dismissal. Temporary teachers, hired for less than an entire school year, have no set employment guarantees. For new teachers, the first two full years with a school district are a probationary period. School districts can and do release these teachers without cause. After two years in a district's employ, a teacher receives permanent status. Once a teacher is permanent, the law provides school officials with a specific list of the allowable grounds for dismissal (see sidebar on next page). The list was last revised in 1995,

The Law Says

Grounds for dismissing a teacher in California

California law states that a teacher who is considered a "permanent employee" of a school district can be dismissed only for the following causes:

- Immoral or unprofessional conduct
- Committing, aiding, or advocating the commission of acts of criminal syndicalism
- Dishonesty
- Unsatisfactory performance
- Evident unfitness for service
- Physical or mental condition unfitting him or her to instruct or associate with children
- Persistent violation of or refusal to obey state law or reasonable state and local regulations
- Conviction of a felony or of any crime involving moral turpitude
- Advocacy or teaching of communism with the intent of indoctrination
- Knowing membership in the Communist Party
- Alcoholism or other drug abuse that makes the employee unfit to instruct or associate with children

Summarized from California Education Code Section 44932

when the Legislature replaced the word "incompetence" with "unsatisfactory performance," an easier charge to substantiate.

Teacher dismissals can be costly, especially when disagreements arise. In 1995, the basic dismissal process for one teacher, before any appeals, was estimated to cost a school district somewhere between $10,000 and $30,000. Going through a full appeals process can cost a district as much as $300,000.

School administrators in California work at the pleasure of the district superintendent, and the superintendent works at the pleasure of the school board. Contractual agreements, however, can sometimes make it expensive for a school board to terminate an administrator's employment as well. In addition, school districts must provide adequate notification of dismissal or reassignment according to specific guidelines. Administrators who were first employed as teachers in the district retain the right to a teaching position should they lose their administrative posts.

Choice and competition as methods of accountability

Many see the introduction of competition into public schools as a necessary catalyst for school improvement. The argument is that when schools are more directly accountable to their customers — students and parents — they will be forced to meet their needs. Schools must provide better service in order to compete for students. Further, the most effective way such accountability can be achieved is by giving families the freedom to choose the schools their children attend.

New laws encourage choice in existing public schools. California lawmakers have responded by requiring school districts to offer choice within their boundaries. As long as space is available, districts are expected to honor parent requests for intradistrict transfers. In growing and often crowded school districts, parental choice may be dramatically constrained by the simple fact that schools have no room.

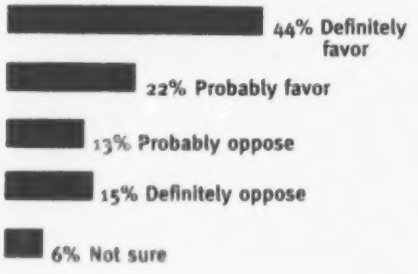
Student transfers from one district to another are a different matter, although families have some latitude. For one, a law commonly referred to as the Allen Bill says that parents' place of employment or the address of their day care provider can qualify them as residents of a school district. In addition, students can transfer to another district if a program that meets their educational needs is not available in their home district. A state law passed in 1993 provided school districts with greater flexibility for allowing interdistrict transfers, but did not require them to provide choice between districts.

California's experiment in charter schools also encourages choice. Charters allow parents and teachers to create new or reconfigure existing public schools to reflect their philosophies and priorities. (See the section on Teaching and Instruction.) Allowing this diversity will, at least theoretically, create schools that differ markedly from those in the rest of the public system, thus offering more choices to families.

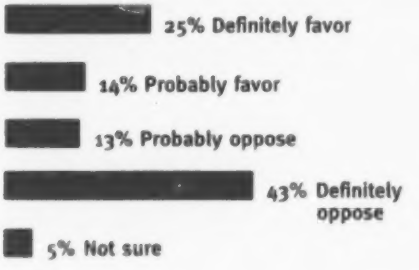
Californians said no to statewide vouchers. In 1993, Californians defeated a state initiative that would have allowed parents to use taxpayer dollars in the form of vouchers to send their children to private and religious schools. Some states, notably Wisconsin and Michigan, are experimenting with smaller voucher models. Such vouchers are certainly the most controversial of the so-called choice options, in part because some believe they violate constitutional requirements regarding the separation of church and state.

Californians Say

1996 poll data showed that the public favors giving parents the ability to choose between public schools for their children.



At the same time, a majority opposes a choice program that would use some of the money now spent on public education to help parents send their children to the private or parochial school of their choice.



Data: Policy Analysis for California Education, 1996

EdSource 1998

ISSUES AND TRENDS

TOUGH QUESTIONS ABOUT THE SYSTEM

- How can California's many different state leaders exercise more effective, cohesive leadership that will result in meaningful school improvement?
- Where should the lines between state, school district, and site level control be drawn?
- What measures of school performance should be used to hold schools accountable?
- How do variables like parental support, community safety, and family background get factored into school accountability?
- How do we balance the need to dismiss teachers who don't perform satisfactorily against every employee's right to fair treatment under the law?

CALIFORNIA'S DEBATE OVER STATE LEADERSHIP

Since at least the 1920s, Californians have struggled with the system of state education leadership contained in the state's constitution. In effect, decision making about the state's mammoth public education system is divided between an elected nonpartisan State Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI), a governor-appointed State Board of Education (SBE), and a budget process that puts school funding decisions in the hands of the Governor and Legislature.

Critics of this configuration are many, and they blame it for a lack of clear state leadership on education issues. In 1978 a member of the SBE resigned because, she said, the board was "paralyzed by ambiguities" in state law regulating the governance of California's schools. After many years of serious discord between the SPI and the State Board, a 1993 court decision clarified the board's policy-setting role. But in its work on the case, the court also noted that the state's constitution and laws have created a system designed for confusion.

Lawmakers can change the system only by putting an amendment to the California constitution on the ballot for voters to decide. In 1996, a commission appointed to review the constitution recommended abolishing the office of State Superintendent. Their recommendations to the Legislature went nowhere, for a number of political reasons. Many believe one of them was the sense that California voters like having this publicly elected position because of the balance of power and public accountability it represents.

Other states use a variety of configurations to govern their public school systems. Half of them have a state superintendent appointed by their state board, which is usually appointed by their governor. A total of 14 states have elected superintendents — either partisan or nonpartisan — and only Wisconsin does not have a state board at all.

Most observers agree that California's current configuration of state leadership hampers its ability to craft a focused,

cohesive plan for educational improvement. Absent a strong political will to alter that configuration — and a widely agreed-upon plan for doing so — change appears unlikely. As a result, the personalities and political perspectives of the individuals elected to be Governor and SPI, and those appointed to the State Board, will probably continue to determine how well the system does work.

CRITIQUES OF THE EDUCATION CODE

Striking the appropriate balance between state and local control of California schools has been a subject of continuing debate. The focal point for this debate is often the California Education Code.

From the Governor's office to local school sites, many Californians have criticized the Ed Code as too prescriptive, saying it has created a tangle of bureaucratic regulations that do little to enhance the quality of public schools. At the same time, almost everyone defends some specific regulations that enforce a policy or promote an interest they believe to be essential.

The law states that the Ed Code is "permissive," which means that school districts are free to take any action not specifically prohibited. In addition, local school districts can apply for a waiver when they wish to undertake an action prohibited under the code.

Many suggestions have been made and initiatives begun to rewrite or streamline the Ed Code, with the goals of reducing unnecessary regulation and encouraging greater local flexibility. This certainly could affect local school districts, but their ability to directly participate in a revision process might be limited. State-level organizations, including those representing groups of school board members, educators, parents, and noneducation interests, are in a much better position to play a direct role in determining how much flexibility the Ed Code provides to local schools.

MOMENTUM TO INCREASE SCHOOL-LEVEL DECISION MAKING

For several years, many educators and state policymakers have supported the idea that local school sites need more flexibility if they are going to improve student performance in their own unique communities.

This belief represents a dramatic departure for some school districts. In the past they may have worked hard to ensure regulatory compliance and standardization from school to school.

Experts Say

"DESPITE DECADES OF STUDIES AND HEARINGS, A RAFT OF ASSORTED LEGAL OPINIONS, AND YEARS OF LEGISLATIVE AND ADMINISTRATIVE END RUNS AROUND THE SYSTEM — AS WELL AS SEVERAL UNSUCCESSFUL BALLOT MEASURES TO ABOLISH THE ELECTED, OSTENSIBLY NONPARTISAN STATE SUPERINTENDENT — IT REMAINS MUCH THE SAME. ... THE STATE'S TOP EDUCATORS ... FIND THEMSELVES TRAPPED IN A MAZE OF CONFLICTING REGULATIONS, DUPLICATIVE AND OVERLAPPING JURISDICTIONS ... AND A FRAGMENTED GOVERNANCE SYSTEM EMBEDDED IN THE STATE CONSTITUTION AND UNLIKELY TO BE CHANGED ANY TIME SOON."

SIGRID BATHEN
"WHO'S IN CHARGE"
CALIFORNIA JOURNAL

Experts Say

"INNOVATIONS IN STAFFING PATTERNS SHOULD BE EXPLORED; BUT THEY MUST BE MUTUALLY AGREED UPON AND MADE PART OF ENFORCEABLE COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGREEMENTS. BY THE YEAR 2001, ALL SCHOOLS SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED TO IMPLEMENT A SITE-BASED SHARED DECISION-MAKING PROCESS — WITH THE NECESSARY TRAINING — WHICH GIVES TEACHERS, PARENTS, AND GUARDIANS REAL AUTHORITY. SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND CHAPTERS SHOULD BE FREE TO BARGAIN SITE-BASED MODELS AND TO INCORPORATE THEM INTO ENFORCEABLE AGREEMENTS. LOCALLY NEGOTIATED ... AGREEMENTS SHOULD SUPERSEDE STATE MODELS."

"STAFFING PATTERNS AND SCHOOL GOVERNANCE"
BLUEPRINT FOR EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE
ADOPTED BY THE STATE COUNCIL OF THE CALIFORNIA TEACHERS ASSOCIATION, JANUARY 1997

This inherent conflict often underlies some schools' difficulty in instituting meaningful education reform at the local level. When schools and school districts attempt to move to greater site-based management or shared decision making they can encounter obstacles around such seemingly simple things as how to order supplies and such complex things as staff assignments. More to the point, they confront fundamental questions about the scope of authority for principals versus teachers versus parents. They also grapple with decisions regarding the power and responsibilities the school board and district administration want to maintain, and legal requirements about what they must maintain.

Schools also have encountered collective bargaining issues. Many changes in school operations — like teacher assignments, class size, and school calendar — affect teacher working conditions. The law requires that these be addressed through the collective bargaining process between school districts and unions. As a result, while one school site might want to try something different, it cannot act alone. Either through formal negotiations, or an agreed-upon district procedure for site-level decision making, employee representatives and the school district must both agree to the change.

The CTA has developed and encourages the use of school-site-specific waivers to the collective bargaining contract in order to allow the staff, administration, parents, and students at a school site to implement a reform program that they have mutually developed. They also have adopted a long-term goal of making the shared decision-making process part of collective bargaining agreements.

FOCUSING MORE ON RESULTS, LESS ON REGULATIONS

All levels of school management and oversight may be moving away from an historical focus on enforcing regulations and making sure that this or that program is provided according to a precise formula. When education reformers talk about putting the "focus on results," they are saying that schools instead need to be evaluated based on how well students are learning.

Central to this trend are efforts — at the local, state, and national levels — to articulate clear standards for student performance and accurate measures of student progress. These are an important component of a

results-oriented approach to school accountability. (See the Student Performance section.)

The idea of holding schools accountable for how well their students do seems obvious and straightforward to much of the public, and is taking hold elsewhere in the United States. Some states, notably Kentucky, have begun tying financial rewards to student performance. Schools that exceed their performance goals, for instance, get a lump-sum bonus to split among the staff. A California task force formed to look at such rewards and sanctions was due to present its recommendations to the Legislature early in 1998.

Such ideas often have stirred debate and sometimes have met with flat-out resistance from teacher and educator groups, who say they are both unfair and ineffective. They cite factors outside their control — such as home environment, poverty, student attitudes, and restrictive government regulations — as important constraints on schools' ability to improve student achievement.

Another issue that often arises is what constitutes valid, reliable, fair measures of student performance. California's contentious experience related to a statewide student testing system — which peaked with the discontinuation of the short-lived CLAS test in 1994 — illustrates the difficulties. (See the Student Performance section.)

Even so, the momentum for "results-oriented" accountability for schools is growing in California. The basic notion is widely supported by business leaders, parent groups, and educators alike, especially when it is tied to a relaxation of state and school district regulations.

MORE EMPHASIS ON INDIVIDUAL ACCOUNTABILITY

A different approach to school accountability starts with the belief that school improvement depends more on individual educators, their professional capabilities, and the continuing improvement of their knowledge and skills.

CHANGES IN STATE AND DISTRICT OVERSIGHT

- State and federal processes used to review school district compliance with program regulations are beginning to look also at the impact of various programs on student work.
- Superintendent of Public Instruction Delaine Eastin has begun to redefine the role of the California Department of Education, saying it needs to change from a regulatory body to one that provides technical assistance and guidance to local school districts.
- More and more school districts are focused on encouraging school-level initiative and creativity rather than on enforcing regulations.

EdSource 1998

Experts Say

"A GROWING NUMBER OF DISTRICTS ARE TRANSFORMING OLD, NONFUNCTIONAL SYSTEMS OF TEACHER EVALUATION INTO PEER REVIEW SYSTEMS THAT IMPROVE TEACHING PERFORMANCE AND COUNSEL OUT THOSE WHO SHOULD NOT BE IN THE PROFESSION. [SUCH SYSTEMS] HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN HELPING BEGINNERS LEARN TO TEACH AND IN HELPING VETERANS WHO ARE HAVING DIFFICULTY TO IMPROVE THEIR TEACHING OR LEAVE THE CLASSROOM WITHOUT UNION GRIEVANCES OR DELAYS."

WHAT MATTERS MOST: TEACHING FOR AMERICA'S FUTURE
NATIONAL COMMISSION ON TEACHING AND AMERICA'S FUTURE

In this view, the key is effective professional accountability for educators. That in turn requires that school districts institutionalize the kind of standards and peer review mechanisms used by other professions, such as doctors. Educators both in California and at the national level are attempting to develop such standards for teachers. (See the Teaching and Instruction section.) They also are creating a system of professional credentials that would certify an educator's level of expertise.

At its national meeting in July 1997, the National Education Association (NEA) endorsed "peer assistance and review of teachers by other teachers" as a way to improve the quality of teaching and increase teacher accountability. CTA, as the California state chapter of NEA, has not officially endorsed this language, particularly as it relates to peer *review*. CTA does offer help to local chapters that want to get involved in the peer *assistance* process.

CHANGES IN UNIONS AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

For a variety of reasons, employee unions in public education are sometimes seen as a barrier to school improvement. Certainly, both employees and administrators on occasion use the strictures of the collective bargaining process as an excuse for not making changes. There is, however, no legal restraint on educators' ability to use the collective bargaining process as a lever for changes they believe will improve schools.

The unions themselves have taken the initiative in some areas — at least at the level of state and national organizations — to attempt to redefine the role they see themselves playing in the field of school improvement. In a 1997 speech, Bob Chase, president of the NEA, said NEA's leadership was committed to reinventing the country's largest teachers' union. "The public is demanding that we do better. And given these expectations, I am convinced that school unions best serve their members by pursuing an aggressive agenda of excellence and reform in public education."

Closer to home, and more closely tied to what actually happens in school districts, is a less adversarial approach to the collective bargaining process itself. These interest-based or win-win negotiations call on both unions and employers to build mutual trust and work collaboratively to arrive at agreements that leave neither side feeling it has lost.

INCREASING PRESSURE FOR CHOICE, CHARTERS, AND VOUCHERS

Starting in 1997, the focus for improving California's schools shifted to developing high standards and accountability measures aimed at raising school and student performance. For the time being this systemwide emphasis appears to have put conversations about market systems for accountability — charter schools, choice options, and vouchers — on the public's back burner. They have by no means disappeared, however.

January 1997 budget recommendations from both President Clinton and Governor Wilson advocated more charter schools and a variety of other options. Parent interest in public school choice for their own children remains high.

The more controversial idea of using vouchers for private schools is also far from gone. Some groups have continued to focus on this strategy in California and nationally. In 1997, for the second year in a row, Governor Wilson proposed a pilot voucher program to give students in the worst-performing public schools the option of transferring to another school, including a private (not religious) one. Should the current efforts to create an effective, cohesive school accountability system fall short in California — or should schools fail to rise to the related challenges — the public may eventually look more favorably on this alternative.

"*There's* **not much** *you can do, it's a state* **law.**"

"*My state* **senator** *doesn't say much about* **education** *issues.*"

WAYS TO GET INVOLVED

ACTIONS TO TAKE

Participate in school decision making

In your school: At the school level, run for the School Site Council. This important body works with the principal to review and evaluate school programs and make budget decisions. In some schools, principals also ask their school site council to help develop new programs or oversee major school change.

Whether you are a teacher, parent, or classified employee, effective service on the school site council requires that you have the success of the whole school (rather than a narrow interest) as your priority. In addition, the site council's ability to help the school increases if members do not simply rubber-stamp requests, but instead ask lots of clarifying questions about the items on the meeting agenda.

In your school district: Districtwide committees and task forces offer a broader perspective. Many parents, teachers, and administrators who have worked on school site councils or task forces find they are interested in issues involving the larger school district. Local businesspeople also are recruited frequently for these roles.

Some school districts form budget advisory committees to review the district finances and to advise the school board and superintendent on budget priorities. Other kinds of school district task forces include academic standards-setting, middle school reorganization, high school graduation standards, and facilities planning.

Decisions made at the district level have a bigger financial impact and affect every school in the district. But the same advice applies: have the interests of the entire district at heart; and ask questions and request information, even on the toughest issues. Part of the job of community and teacher involvement in these advisory committees and task forces is to give the best advice to the administration and school board, which can be done only if the participant is thoroughly and accurately informed.

Staying informed about the work of the local school board and district-level committees, and communicating with them about the decisions they are making, is a way everyone can help ensure school accountability.

Hold schools and decision makers accountable

In your local school and district: Teachers, classified employees, and parents can all stay informed about the actions of the school site council by attending these public meetings, or asking those who attend for agendas and minutes if they're kept. The school plans produced by the council are public documents as well. The same is true for any group that makes policy recommendations at the school district level.

Parents can play a part in school accountability by simply providing constructive feedback when they believe schools or educators have done something poorly or well. In turn, educators can make a point of reporting to the community both the successes they enjoy and the areas they are targeting for improvement.

Ultimately, the one group directly accountable to the public is the locally elected school board. Paying attention to who serves and the decisions they make is simple but important. In turn, the school board holds the district superintendent accountable, and the superintendent is responsible for other school district employees. The general public has no legal standing regarding the discipline or dismissal of any individual school employee. Personnel matters in school districts are confidential.

In California as a whole: Voters need to understand the power California's state government wields over its public schools. Satisfaction or dissatisfaction over education issues needs to be expressed to state leaders as well as local ones.

Become a responsible school leader

In your school: At schools, leadership can be formal and informal. Certainly, the president of the local parent-teacher organization can help shape the quality of education or the level of public support for school efforts. But so too can those teachers who are especially vocal. They need to recognize the key role they play in shaping parent and general public opinion about schools, either positively or negatively.

Exercising responsible, informed school leadership — whether you're an employee, a parent, or an interested community member — can make a difference in the quality of schools. Often leadership begins because of a personal commitment to a specific issue. Too often that is also where it ends.

> *"I never pay* **attention** *to school board* **elections."**
>
> *"Who* **approved** *those* **textbooks** *anyway?"*

"I should get to **choose** *my child's* **school."**

"School **officials** *need to be able to* **control enrollments."**

In your school district: The ultimate form of community participation is to run for and serve on the school board. Terms are for four years. School board members can have tremendous influence over school quality and performance. As representatives of the public, they take a leadership role in establishing the vision for local schools, developing the policies necessary to implement that vision, and making sure schools are accountable to the community for the results.

WHERE TO GO FOR ANSWERS

School principals can provide the meeting schedule and explain the selection process for the school site council and any school advisory committees. They can also describe the best process to use and the best person to contact when you have a concern or compliment about something in a classroom, school, or the district as a whole.

The **school district superintendent** or his or her assistant has information about districtwide committees and opportunities for involvement. This is also the place to find out about the overall performance of district students, financial reports, specific policies, school board meeting schedules, and how to contact school board members. You can get information about local school board election dates and openings — and the process for running — both here and at the County Registrar of Voters.

School board members can probably best explain their own decisions as well as talk about the rationale behind many board policies. Board members generally are not aware of the day-to-day decisions made at every school site and can take official actions only as a group; they wield no special power as individuals.

Legislators, whom you can contact in Sacramento or in their local district office, should be able to explain their voting record on education and their position on any specific education issue. This is usually done through their staffs, which often include a specialist on K-12 education.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ...

School Governance

Who's In Charge
Sigrid Bathen

In this article the author explores the conflict inherent in California's state level structure of school leadership, particularly relating to the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the State Board of Education. *California Journal*, June 1997

Education: How Do We Get the Results We Want?

This issue book is a tool to help communities make decisions about how to get desired results from education, detailing the benefits and costs of four different perspectives on who should make decisions about education: businesses, professionals, market forces, or the community. Kettering Foundation, 1992

Dean's Office
University Extension
University of California
Davis, CA 95616-8727
530/757-8663
fax: 530/754-5015
e-mail: paguilera@unexmail.ucdavis.edu

Education Reform 1995-96
Chester E. Finn, Jr. and Diane Ravitch

See the **Curriculum** section.

Focus on School Improvement

A planning guide that provides a coherent framework to support the efforts of educators, parents, or policymakers involved in developing and implementing plans for school improvement. Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, 1995

WestEd
730 Harrison Street
San Francisco, CA 94107-1242
800/645-3276
www.wested.org

Looking Back, Thinking Ahead: American School Reform 1993-1995

This report reviews major issues in American primary and secondary education for 1993-94, including standards and choice, and suggests several things to look for in the future. Hudson Institute, Inc., 1994

Educational Excellence Network
Hudson Institute
P.O. Box 26-919
Indianapolis, IN 46226
317/545-1000

Open the Schoolhouse Doors: A Parent/Community Action Project

Part of a statewide PTA project targeted to helping parents become activists on behalf of their children, this comprehensive guide is a rich resource for parents who want to get more involved in school governance and decision making. California Congress of Parents, Teachers, and Students, Inc., 1995

California State PTA
930 Georgia Street
P.O. Box 15015
Los Angeles, CA 90015
213/620-1100
fax: 213/620-1411

Organizing the Other Half of Teaching
Julia E. Koppich and Charles Taylor Kerchner

Arguing for the transformation of education labor relations, this paper proposes ideas to position teachers and their unions as leaders in creating a 21st century institution of education by focusing their efforts on new roles and responsibilities, and a new definition of professionalism. 1996 (publication PP-96-91)

Policy Analysis for California Education
School of Education
3653 Tolman Hall
University of California
Berkeley, CA 94720-1670
510/642-7223
fax: 510/642-9148

Rising to the Challenge: A New Agenda for California Schools and Communities
Education Commission of the States

ECS researchers find that California's school system has improved its efficiency and performance over the last decade, but assert that the system needs to be redesigned to shift responsibility for improved student achievement to the local level. 1995

Education Commission of the States
707 17th Street, Suite 2700
Denver, CO 80202-3427
303/299-3600
fax: 303/296-8332
e-mail: ecs@ecs.org

Responsibility and Accountability

Accountability and School Performance: Implications from Restructuring Schools
Fred M. Newmann, M. Bruce King, and Mark Rigdon

The authors report on their research showing that strong external accountability measures often fail to improve student achievement unless internal professional accountability is also in place at a school. Harvard Educational Review, Spring 1997

Maximizing School Board Leadership

See the **Curriculum** section.

Results: The Key to Continuous School Improvement
Mike Schmoker

Arguing that all school efforts should be focused on results, the author describes how meaningful teamwork, measurable goals, and regular collection and analysis of performance data form the conceptual foundations for results-based education. In addition, it offers suggestions for moving beyond the use of standardized tests to measure achievement.

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
1250 North Pitt Street
Alexandria, VA 22314-1453
703/549-9110 or 800/933-ASCD
fax: 703/299-8631
www.ascd.org

The School Portfolio: A Comprehensive Framework for School Improvement
Victoria L. Bernhardt

This book describes how schools can develop and utilize portfolios as a framework for evaluating school reform and as a self-assessment tool to exhibit their goals, progress, achievement, and vision for improvement. Eye on Education, Inc., 1994

P.O. Box 388
Princeton Junction, NJ 08550
609/799-9188
fax:609/799-3698

Continuing the Commitment: Essential Components of a Successful Education System

This publication outlines a nine-point agenda for educational change based on the fundamental belief that all children can learn at ever higher levels. [These components include standards, performance and assessment, school accountability, school autonomy, professional development, parent involvement, learning readiness, technology, and safety and discipline.] The Business Roundtable, May 1995

1615 L Street, NW, Suite 1100
Washington, DC 20036
202/872-1260
fax: 202/466-3509

IF YOU'RE WONDERING

Who makes curriculum decisions and what's the process?
— turn to Curriculum, Section B.

How are state standards and assessment of student performance determined?
— turn to Student Performance, Section C.

Who decides the instructional methods used at a school?
— turn to Teaching and Instruction, Section D.

What are the professional standards being recommended for teachers and who is responsible for them?
— turn to Teaching and Instruction, Section D.

How is the level of school funding decided? And who chooses how the money is spent?
— turn to School Funding, Section E.

What responsibilities does the community have to support schools?
— turn to Shared Responsibility, Section G.

NOTES ... QUESTIONS ... IDEAS ...

A Shared Responsibility

SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES TOGETHER

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ABOUT THIS SECTION

- Acknowledging as California citizens that a strong public school system benefits our economy and our quality of life.
- Providing opportunities for all members of the community to get involved with improving California's schools and supporting its students.
- Providing schools with the resources and high expectations necessary to improve student learning.
- Doing everything possible to ensure students come to school ready to learn by coordinating family responsibility, community support, and state policy.
- Engaging parents in school improvement discussions as well as increasing their involvement with their child's school and academic progress.

This Handbook includes a great deal of information about schools' responsibilities to the community, parents, and most importantly, students. It would not be complete, however, without discussing the vital roles the community plays in schools' ability to do their job well.

To put it simply, the public has four primary roles:

- Affirm the purpose and importance of public education.
- Support and oversee schools to make sure they can and do achieve that purpose effectively.
- Make sure children come to school ready to learn.
- Take an active role in educating young people outside of school.

None of these tasks are simple, however, especially when "the public" is actually a diverse population with broadly varied interests, backgrounds, and opinions.

That diversity creates communication problems for those who care most about public schools and would like to get all Californians to work together to strengthen them. Meeting this complex challenge today calls for a strong commitment, some new strategies, and perhaps a return to the old-fashioned concept of civil public discourse upon which our American democratic way of life was based.

Venice Beach, Los Angeles

THE PUBLIC'S ROLE IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

Public schools cannot exist — much less function effectively — without the support of the community they are expected to serve. At a minimum, California's public schools depend on an adequate allocation of state tax dollars. Research shows, however, that the most effective schools receive much more than financial support from the larger community. Other types of public support include volunteer time, extra resources, informed involvement in school decision making, advocacy for school programs, and reinforcement of school rules and goals.

In general, that support emanates from a shared conviction that our free public schools are essential to the education of young people in our society. Many observers believe that it is at this most fundamental level that communities should begin their conversations about public schools and school improvement.

Affirming the purpose and need for public schools

Most Americans take free public education for granted. After all, compulsory public education has been woven into the fabric of our lives and expectations for more than a century. Yet public schools do not simply exist or thrive of their own accord.

Public schools are the result of a kind of "social contract." Educators, hired by elected public officials, agree to provide a quality education based on the public's goals. The public agrees to provide financial and other support needed to sustain good schools and to do what it can to further those educational goals. To remain effective and in force, the goals of this contract should be agreed upon by all parties and the terms and obligations adequately met.

Experts studying this social contract point to a recent series of events and societal changes that have distanced the public from its schools and weakened the mutual understanding of the schools' purposes. They contend that the contract needs to be renegotiated if the public school system is to regain the broad support it needs to remain strong and effective.

So how can the social contract be strengthened?

For one, members of the public need a renewed sense of their own "shared fate" with public schools. Some of that comes through open

Experts Say

"I DON'T THINK WE CAN EXPECT THAT MANY PEOPLE WILL JOIN TOGETHER TO IMPROVE SCHOOLS OR THAT EDUCATORS WILL WELCOME THEM TO PLAY A LARGE PART IN THE EFFORT UNLESS WE ARE CLEAR ABOUT THE PARTICULAR ROLES A PUBLIC — AND ONLY A PUBLIC — CAN PLAY."

POLITICAL ROLES FOR THE PUBLIC INCLUDE:

- RE-ESTABLISHING A PUBLIC MANDATE
- JUDGING RESULTS
- PROTECTING LARGER PUBLIC INTERESTS/CONVENING DISPARATE FACTIONS
- OVERCOMING INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS

WAYS THE PUBLIC OR COMMUNITY CAN EDUCATE INCLUDE:

- MOTIVATING YOUNG PEOPLE
- PROVIDING A CONTEXT FOR LEARNING
- MAKING AVAILABLE A REPOSITORY OF SUBSTANTIVE KNOWLEDGE

DAVID MATHEWS
FROM *IS THERE A PUBLIC FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS?*

WHY DO WE NEED PUBLIC SCHOOLS?

The following points, adapted from *Do We Still Need Public Schools?* by the Center on National Education Policy, provide a place to begin considering what purposes public education ought to serve and whether or not it is worth supporting.

A strong public education system can help improve social conditions. Education remains the best strategy for preventing crime and violence. Schools also have been called on to formally address a range of other social problems, such as drug abuse.

A strong public education system can help promote cultural unity. Public schools are the primary institution for transmitting our shared American culture and language. They also provide opportunities for young people to learn about and understand cultures different from their own. Both hold great importance for maintaining safe, harmonious communities — particularly in a state as diverse as California.

A strong public education system can help young people become knowledgeable and responsible citizens. Not only do young people need to learn about the workings of government, they also should be ready to participate in political life and help solve the complex problems our society faces.

A strong public education system can help people become more economically self-sufficient. The best educated members of our society are the most economically successful. Better-educated people are more likely to become taxpayers, not only paying their own way but helping to support community institutions — everything from schools and parks to highways and prisons.

A strong public education system will help keep California competitive. As a significant economy in its own right, this state has flourished thanks to the skills and technical innovation of the people who live here. California's economic and business future is only as good as the knowledge and abilities of its future workers, today's students.

A strong public education system can help enhance individual happiness and enrich individual lives. For more than a century we have taken national pride in the uniquely American Dream that all children — no matter how humble their beginnings — have the opportunity for success and upward mobility.

A strong public education system strengthens the quality of community life as well. The community benefits from educated people in ways beyond the financial. It is enriched by those who continue to learn throughout their lives, appreciate arts and literature, and are curious about the world.

EdSource 1998

discussions of the problems that schools confront. Those problems, stresses David Mathews, in *Is There A Public For Public Schools?*, need to be "described in 'public language' based on everyday experience."

Beyond that, the public needs to generally agree on the purposes for public schools. Recent efforts to set academic standards, both at the state level and in local schools, represent one attempt to redefine and reaffirm that purpose. (See the section on Student Performance.) Mathews, among others, voices some concern that such standard setting by professionals is not all that needs to be done. Instead, it is just one ingredient in broader, more inclusive, and more deliberative conversations about what purposes public schools should serve in a community.

Make sure schools are effective

Deciding schools are important, and even agreeing on their purpose, is certainly not all the public is responsible for. Along with that reaffirmation, the public has several ongoing roles. These roles generally are delegated to elected officials and sometimes to the media as the public's collective eyes and ears.

The public has a right and a responsibility to judge the results that public schools produce. This happens through a variety of means. Absent other agreed-upon measures, the general public often measures school success through simple, convenient yardsticks such as a retail clerk's math ability, the appearance of the local schoolyard, and the latest story broadcast on the nightly news. The more formal exercise of this role is through publicly elected officials, be they local school board members or the Governor.

Another role members of the public can play is to protect the larger community interest in public education. Through their traditional watchdog role, the media attempt to do this. In addition, organizations and individuals act as conveners,

THE PUBLIC AS SCHOOL OVERSEERS AND CHAMPIONS

Various members of the general public play a role in the quality and effectiveness of public schools, either indirectly or directly. Following are a few examples:

Voters elect public officials, including local school board members, who have direct responsibility for holding schools accountable.

The media provide information by which the general public forms impressions and judges its schools.

School-based community organizations — such as PTAs and education foundations — seek community support and resources to help make schools better.

Community-based organizations, from Chambers of Commerce to the League of Women Voters, often make schools and school improvement a high-priority activity.

Some school officials encourage all members of the school community to discuss the purpose of public schools, the challenges schools face, and the opportunities for improvement.

School reform networks supported by business, private foundations, government agencies, and local communities work with educators to remove the institutional barriers that can block improvement.

EdSource 1998

Tending to children's basic needs

In situations where families can't meet their children's basic needs, community service providers have some responsibility to help. These include public health organizations and Child Protective Services, among others. Those providers, however, often have difficulty connecting with needy families and letting them know about available services. They also struggle with limited resources.

To maximize their effectiveness in serving student needs, many schools and communities have formed partnerships. These public and public/private partnerships, funded by programs such as Healthy Start, provide services or referrals to local families. Some say this is effective because school is a good place around which to organize services for families. Others criticize it as taking away from the academic purpose for which schools are primarily responsible.

A 1996 evaluation by SRI International that assessed the success of 40 local Healthy Start initiatives showed that such programs had a small positive impact on the school as a whole after just two years in operation. More parent interest in school activities and less student mobility were the most notable results. Researchers reported seeing a general pattern of improvement they believed could become more significant over time.

bringing together diverse groups to deliberate on an issue and take action if needed. Mathews describes such "public action" as both comprehensive and inclusive, in contrast to the actions of a special interest group. It is through such deliberations — whether they are convened by the public or educators — that the social contract can be effectively re-examined.

Sending children to school ready to learn

An important home and community responsibility is to make sure students enter school classrooms in a condition that makes it possible for them to learn. The ideal is for all children to come to school well-fed, properly clothed, and in a healthy mental and emotional state. The reality is often quite different, because of poverty, parental neglect, or other circumstances that are usually beyond the student's control.

Children have more difficulty learning when these fundamentals are not in place. As a result, school officials and teachers often find it hard to fulfill their responsibilities. If parents and community members want young people to be successful in school, this crucial problem can't be ignored. The community as a whole needs to decide what level of responsibility it will take to support families, and families need to decide how important education really is for their children.

Participating in young people's education

While the public entrusts much of the job of educating young people to the schools, we know that learning neither begins nor ends at the schoolhouse doors. When the community as a whole shares in young people's education, schools find their goals more attainable.

For example, research shows that broad public support for schools apparently encourages students to work harder. Students from families who show they value education also do better in school. When businesses, government leaders, and regular citizens work together to make educational achievement a social norm in their community, students learn more both in and out of school.

PARENTS HOLD A SPECIAL PLACE

Of all non-educators, parents have the closest relationship and greatest vested interest in the public schools. As a result, while the roles parents play are largely the same as those of the general public, the intensity with which they can and ought to play them is quite different.

CHILD'S PRIMARY CAREGIVER AND FIRST TEACHER

Certainly parents have the first responsibility for seeing that their children's basic needs are met. They are also their children's first and most important teacher. The extent to which parents take these roles seriously — and have the capacity to adequately perform them — determines much of their children's success in school.

AFFIRMING PURPOSE

In any community, parents' aspirations for their children are vital in determining the schools' focus and purpose. Parents need to be an integral part of conversations about what students should know and be able to do, and they ought to understand how schools intend to reach the agreed-upon goals.

ENSURING EFFECTIVENESS

Parents are the front line for judging schools' effectiveness, although this can often be limited to how well they believe the school has served their individual child. Nonetheless, their judgment regarding their own child's education helps inform the general public about school effectiveness.

Often, as well, parents see firsthand when schools need more resources and/or public support. Many volunteer great amounts of time and effort. In addition, because parents are typically in the schools without being of the schools, they can function as a bridge between schools and the larger community.

EdSource 1998

Another important role adults can play is to help young people understand the importance of what they learn in school. When a successful businessperson tells a student that he or she uses algebra every day at work, the relevance of that algebra class becomes clearer. It's even more effective when the community provides students with the opportunity to apply their new-found knowledge to a real-life community project.

The community also can extend the formal learning that takes place in schools by making available to young people the vast repository of knowledge that exists outside the school walls. Museums, libraries, the media, and performing arts groups all can supplement schools' educational efforts. Convenient new links through the Internet provide exciting potential for more expanded learning.

IMPROVING COMMUNICATIONS AND WORKING TOGETHER

Meaningful communication between educators and the public is vital for continued school improvement. Recent public opinion research indicates that the vast majority of people agree on the basic skills students should learn, on the need for high academic standards, and on the teaching of core civic values.

These areas of common ground can provide a positive foundation for communication. They don't, however, guarantee that the conversation will go smoothly.

In each community, and throughout California, public education affects multiple groups with varied roles and sometimes conflicting personal and political interests. More and more, school leaders, community organizations, private foundations, and public think tanks are grappling with these communication issues. Some themes are emerging.

Making routine communications a higher priority

Schools need to place significant emphasis on communicating effectively with the constituencies they serve, including parents, businesses, community members, and policymakers. They also need to make sure their internal communications with employees are effective, because teachers and other staff often communicate directly with parents and the public about schools. This is easier said than done. It takes time, resources, and communication expertise — all three of which are often in short supply in public schools.

BARRIERS TO COMMUNICATION

In school communities throughout California, well-meaning individuals committed to educational improvement struggle with communication barriers that at times seem insurmountable. Here, along with a description of some of those barriers, are a few suggestions to help start addressing them.

BUSY PEOPLE, BUSY SCHEDULES

Parents and other community members, as well as educators themselves, have little time to spare and certainly none they want to waste. What can be done to convince other members of the school community that time spent communicating about school improvement issues is time well spent?

- Make school improvement feel like a high priority, a matter of urgency.
- Use the available time wisely, respecting everyone's schedules. Come to meetings well prepared to participate.
- Develop creative alternatives to traditional meetings, like on-line chat rooms.

DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS

Parents are often unclear about when help is needed or expected at school, about their role in school decision making, and about their rights as a parent. Many California parents are first-generation Americans who are unfamiliar with our tradition of active civic involvement or the American concept of public education as a shared community responsibility. What can be done to help all parents feel welcome and comfortable about becoming involved?

- Assess whether the school environment and all communications to parents clearly welcome them.
- Discuss and make clear the roles of parents, educators, and policymakers in school decision making.
- Learn about and recognize cultural differences, and commit to overcoming communication barriers such as language (by using translators, for example).

A LACK OF SHARED KNOWLEDGE

When educators sit down with parents and community members to discuss school issues, they sometimes forget that these lay people aren't familiar with school operations and laws, to say nothing of curriculum and instruction. Even among educators, the understanding of the "big picture" varies dramatically. How can school groups make sure everyone who comes to the table to discuss school improvement has enough information to participate in a meaningful and effective way?

- Make sure appropriate, easy-to-understand background information is readily available to all participants.
- Find a way to ask and answer background questions that is responsive but does not derail a group from its task.
- Be constantly vigilant about not using education jargon, like acronyms and shorthand explanations that are not in the public's vocabulary.

EdSource 1998

In business, routine ongoing communication with customers and employees is usually a high priority. A company with a $50 million annual budget and a thousand employees located at 15 different sites typically allocates substantial resources and uses professional expertise both for internal and customer communications. Business leaders know that such investments help the company realize its goals, in part by helping maintain both employee and customer loyalty.

A school district with a $50 million annual budget — which might be serving 10,000 students — often simply adds communications to the other responsibilities of its administrators, a role for which many are not trained. Public information officers usually are found only at the district office. And they are often the first to be let go if a district has to cut its budget. While school leaders are often criticized by the public for not communicating, they are equally likely to be taken to task for paying staff or consultants to help with this critical function.

When schools don't have mechanisms in place for communicating regularly and effectively with the public and employees, small issues can grow into large problems. Both educators and the public need to recognize the importance of effective communication for maintaining a strong education system. School leaders also need to increase the strategic value and professionalism of their communication efforts to get the greatest possible return on the investment.

New communication strategies that engage the public

Educators — and the communication experts who work with them — are increasingly convinced that neither passively hoping for school support nor waging the traditional "good news" public relations campaign is adequate for rebuilding public support for schools.

Many recommend more interactive communication between schools and their communities, a process often referred to as public engagement. It involves bringing educators and the public together to discuss problems openly and in terms the public can relate to. It also calls for open

deliberations that examine a wide variety of perspectives, weigh the pros and cons of various program options, and eventually arrive at a general direction or range of actions that both educators and the public can live with.

Successful examples of public engagement activities exist throughout California. In many school districts, school officials have encouraged the community to become involved in such activities as defining standards, developing technology plans, and evaluating facility needs. Structured efforts to raise and debate education issues also are taking place outside schools, sponsored by local newspapers and civic groups. National organizations are beginning to sponsor public forums or town hall meetings on education in selected states, including some in California.

If these kinds of communication efforts are successful, they can help create the level of public support and involvement that is essential for reform to succeed and for California's public school system to thrive.

Working through issues together

For the sake of California's young people, adults need to pull together to create a strong public education system. A key to doing so is to embrace the democratic traditions of civil discourse. Too often in our society today we allow disagreements to polarize us, sometimes to the point we forget the goals, values, and priorities that we share.

In a system as complex as education, "all or nothing" tactics (my way or no way) serve few. And often they result in nothing changing at all. An approach being embraced by communities and leaders throughout the state is a conscious effort to work toward progress instead of polarization. When people can use differences of opinion to shed light instead of heat, they can arrive at mutually agreeable solutions.

Experts Say

"To embrace a centrist position with passion should not be confused with settling for the middle of the road out of moral confusion or a distaste for conflict. Instead, the centrist position I envision derives from a deep and abiding reverence for the 'middle way,' for balance, and for understanding. It embodies a faith that most people are willing to listen to all sides of an argument and work toward a fair resolution of differences. Regarding those with different beliefs as the enemy has no place in the center."

Daniel L. Duke
"Seeking a Centrist Position to Counter the Politics of Polarization"
Phi Delta Kappan

A TIME FOR ACTION

To make sure that California has a strong public education system, we must first reaffirm its importance and purpose. Then we need to clarify the roles educators and the public each play as we commit together to working through difficult issues and meeting change head on.

The end of the 20th century may well be remembered as a watershed period for improving public schools in California. Current events and the present economic and political climate provide ideal opportunities for all Californians to make a difference.

- The state's economy is improving, providing welcome additional funds for schools.
- The business community is becoming increasingly informed, committed, and active on behalf of California's schools.
- California voters now say improving education is their top priority.
- Most educators and policymakers agree that schools need to change, even if they don't always agree on how.
- Major initiatives throughout the state — such as class-size reduction and statewide standards — are creating momentum for improvement and positive media coverage.

Times of great change can provide wonderful new opportunities, but they can also create grave problems and serious conflicts. Thoughtful, honest, civil dialogue about fundamental education issues is crucial to providing California with strong public schools.

We need to make well-informed decisions that put students first. To do so, educators, policymakers, parents, and community members must find ways to become well informed, share their diverse opinions, listen to each other, and develop a mutual understanding of both the challenges and the opportunities.

Working together, Californians can strengthen their public schools. It will take time. It will take sustained focus. It will take better communications. And it will take compromise. But we can create a shared vision and commitment for excellent public schools as part of a thriving California. And we can make that vision into a reality.

Experts Say

"THERE ARE OPPORTUNITIES OUT THERE; THINGS ARE STIRRING. IT'S UP TO PARENTS AND TEACHERS TO FIND THEIR WAY INTO THE CURRENT REFORM DEBATE. CHANGE WON'T HAPPEN ... IF IT DEPENDS ON POLICYMAKERS, BIG-NAME TASK FORCES, WELL-INTENTIONED GOVERNORS, OR SYSTEMS THINKERS. CHANGE WILL TAKE PEOPLE WHO REMEMBER WHAT OTHERWISE GETS LOST: THAT IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT BUILDING A POWERFUL AMERICA ... OR EVEN WORLD-CLASS JOB SKILLS; IT'S ABOUT CREATING A MORE POWERFUL CITIZENRY AND A MORE CARING ONE. EVEN THEN WE'LL HAVE LOTS TO ARGUE ABOUT. BUT IT'S ABOUT OUR KIDS AND OUR SHARED FUTURE WITH THEM. WORTH ARGUING ABOUT."

DEBORAH MEIER
CORNERSTONES OF COLLABORATION

FOR MORE INFORMATION ...

General References

Angels in the News
Christopher Conte

This article describes and critiques a movement towards "civic journalism," which fundamentally changes the way the press covers communities as part of a broader effort to reform civic life. *Governing*, August 1996

Cornerstones of Collaboration

Presenting diverse perspectives and opinions, this compilation from presentations made at a 1996 conference on collaboration presents provocative ideas about creating common ground for school improvement among educators, parents, higher education, business, and other groups.

Excellence Through Collaboration and Outreach Center
Graduate School of Education
University of California
Berkeley, CA 94720-1670
510/643-2052
fax: 510/643-6239
e-mail: eco@socrates.berkeley.edu

Do We Still Need Public Schools?
Center on National Education Policy

See the **Changing World** section.

Education: How Can Schools and Communities Work Together to Meet the Challenge?

A discussion guide for schools and communities to use as they address questions about the purposes public schools serve and how to meet them. 1995

Study Circles Resource Center
P.O. Box 203
Pomfret, CT 06258
860/928-2616
fax: 860/928-3713
e-mail: scrc@neca.com

Families and Schools: A Global Perspective for a Multicultural Society

This report provides practical information and examples of successful parent involvement programs as presented at an international conference on schools and families. Center for the Study of Parent Involvement, 1995

National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education
1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Suite 310
Washington, DC 20036
Fax orders only: 202/872-4050
Attn: Sue Ferguson

Starting an Education Foundation

This booklet provides practical advice about starting a foundation committed to supporting local schools.

California Consortium of Education Foundations
P.O. Box 9290
Stanford, CA 94309
650/324-1654
e-mail: s.sweeney@forsythe.stanford.edu

Is There a Public for Public Schools?
David Mathews

Drawing from a decade of research by the Kettering Foundation, this book documents the deterioration of the relationship between the public and public education, and the essential value of that relationship to school quality. Kettering Foundation Press, 1996

Learn & Live

Featuring exciting highlights of community educational activities that promote the potential of the existing system, these materials include a documentary film hosted by Robin Williams and a companion resource book. 1997

George Lucas Educational Foundation
P.O. Box 672
Santa Rosa, CA 95402
888/4RKIDS1
www.glef.org

National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs

National PTA presents its recommendations for effective parent/family involvement in schools. This publication includes research findings about the importance of parent involvement, quality indicators for evaluating schools' involvement programs, and tools to help put ideas into action. 1997

National PTA
330 N. Wabash Avenue
Suite 2100
Chicago, IL 60611-3690
312/670-6782
fax: 312/670-6783
www.pta.org

Urban Sanctuaries
Milbrey W. McLaughlin

This book attempts to explain why some neighborhood organizations are resources that enable youth to survive the harsh realities of daily urban life in America. In describing the involvement of youth and adults in such organizations, the author identifies shared common features including family-like environments and dynamic adult leadership. Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994

California's Healthy Start School-Linked Services Initiative: Summary of Evaluation Findings

Funded by the Foundation Consortium for School-Linked Services, this report provides an overview and summary of the results of the statewide evaluation of California's Healthy Start initiative. 1996

SRI International
333 Ravenswood Avenue
Menlo Park, CA 94025-3493
650/859-5109

Challenge Toolkit: Family-School Compacts

This guide provides information to Challenge and other school districts and schools interested in using family-school compacts to encourage closer partnerships between schools and families. These compacts are jointly developed agreements between the home and school that describe how each partner will help students meet the school's challenging standards and goals. 1997

California Department of Education
Bureau of Publications
Sales Unit
P.O. Box 271
Sacramento, CA 95812-0271
916/445-1260 or
800/995-4099
fax: 916/323-0823
www.cde.ca.gov/publications.Pub.html

Quality Counts

A state-by-state report card on the condition of public education based on measures of student achievement, standards and assessment, quality of teaching, school climate, and resources. *Education Week*, January 1997

800/346-1834
fax: 202/686-0797
www.edweek.org/qc/

Education Commission of the States

ECS has three 1997 publications dedicated to school/community communications:

Building Community Support for Schools: A Practical Guide to Strategic Communications

Designed for school, district, and state communications professionals, this guide gives the "big picture" of how to develop, carry out, and evaluate a strategic communication plan tied to education improvement efforts.

Do-It-Yourself Focus Groups: A Low-Cost Way to Listen to Your Community

This step-by-step guide gives educators a systematic way to listen to what is important to people in the school community; what changes they want to see in their schools; and how they want to participate in making decisions about those changes.

Let's Talk About School Improvement

This guide helps educators, policymakers, and community members host two-way conversations about what the public wants for education and how public schools can do a better job of educating students.

ECS
707 17th Street, Suite 2700
Denver, CO 80202-3427
303/299-3600
fax: 303/296-8332

EdSource Publications

Californians and Their Schools: Renegotiating the Social Contract

Along with summarizing recent public opinion research regarding California's public schools, this report provides suggestions for increasing public engagement. June 1995

Get Involved! California's Public Schools Are Your Schools

Part of the EdSource School Involvement Project, this four-color brochure focuses on the importance of public education, the demands on today's schools, and ways for all members of the community to get constructively involved in school improvement. September 1997

EdSource
4151 Middlefield Road
Suite 100
Palo Alto, CA 94303-4743
650/857-9604
fax: 650/857-9618
www.edsource.org

NOTES ... QUESTIONS ... IDEAS ...

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WHERE TO GO FOR ANSWERS

(Adapted from a more comprehensive EdSource publication)

State Government Offices

You can contact the following offices for information about the statewide laws, policies, organizations, and initiatives that affect California's public schools. You also can find out about public hearing dates and other opportunities to express your opinion to the appropriate public officials.

California Department of Education

Superintendent of Public Instruction
721 Capitol Mall
Sacramento, CA 95814
or
P.O. Box 944272
Sacramento, CA 94244-2720
916/657-4766
fax: 916/657-4975
www.cde.ca.gov

Curriculum — guidelines, requirements, frameworks, ways to earn a high school diploma.

Student Performance — statewide testing programs, rankings of California compared with other states, due process for students, annual reports on high school performance, and school safety statistics.

Teaching and Instruction — how state education legislation will be implemented.

School Funding — enrollment figures, financial data about schools, state categorical programs, state education budget, federal programs in California.

Miscellaneous — court cases related to education, information about private schools, calendar of education events.

State Board of Education

721 Capitol Mall
Sacramento, CA 95814
916/657-5478
fax: 916/653-7016
www.cde.ca.gov/board/board.html

Curriculum and Student Performance — schedules and agendas for meetings where curriculum frameworks, textbook adoptions, students assessments, etc. will be approved.

The System — statewide education policies and regulations, waivers from the Education Code, changing school district boundaries.

Miscellaneous — names of State Board members and how to contact them, board positions on ballot measures.

Assembly and Senate Education Committees

Assembly
Room 3123 State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814
916/445-9431
www.leginfo.ca.gov/bilinfo.html

Senate
Room 2083 State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814
916/445-2522
www.leginfo.ca.gov/bilinfo.html

Miscellaneous — analysis and status of education bills, legislative calendar, names of committee members, how to contact them, schedule of hearings.

Commission on Teacher Credentialing

1812 9th Street
Sacramento, CA 95814-7000
916/445-7254
fax: 916/327-3166
www.ctc.ca.gov

Teaching and Instruction — credentials for teachers, professional standards, proficiency testing dates and results, approval of college training programs, regulations about seniority and tenure.

Governor's Office

State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814
916/445-2841
fax: 916/445-4633
www.ca.gov/s/governor

Shared Responsibility — information about appointments to commissions and boards.

School Funding — proposed state budget.

Miscellaneous — Governor's education policy.

California Office of Child Development and Education

1121 L Street, Suite 600
Sacramento, CA 95814
916/323-0611
fax: 916/323-3753

All Areas — information about the governor's policies and programs related to public education.

Legislative Analyst's Office

925 L Street, Suite 1000
Sacramento, CA 95814
916/445-4656
fax: 916/324-4281
www.lao.ca.gov

School Funding — annual analysis of Governor's budget.

Miscellaneous — analysis of education legislation.

Research Organizations

Following are publicly and privately funded research organizations that have K-12 education issues as an important focus. They generally offer publications covering specific topics they have investigated.

Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE)

School of Education
3653 Tolman Hall
University of California
Berkeley, CA 94720-1670
510/642-PACE
fax: 510/642-9148

All Areas — Independent analysis of state education policy issues, technical support, and advice to policymakers, publications, evaluation of educational reforms.

School Services of California, Inc.

1121 L Street, Suite 1060
Sacramento, CA 95814
916/446-7517
fax: 916/446-2011
www.sscal.com

School Funding — Updates and analyses of education-related legislation, workshops, and conferences.

California Tomorrow

Fort Mason Center, Building B
San Francisco, CA 94123
415/441-7631
fax: 415/441-7635

The Changing World, Student Performance, and Shared Responsibility — Publications, symposia, and demographic data with a special focus on the needs of California's ethnically diverse student population.

Children Now

1212 Broadway, Suite 530
Oakland, CA 94612
510/763-2444
fax: 510/763-1974
www.childrennow

The Changing World and Shared Responsibility — Positions on child-related issues in California, publications, and statistics about the conditions of children.

Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning

335 Shake Mill Road
Santa Cruz, CA 95060
408/427-3628
fax: 408/427-1612
www.cftl.org

Teaching and Instruction — Information about the relationships between education research and practice, and the resulting professional development issues.

WestEd

730 Harrison Street
San Francisco, CA 94107
415/565-3000
fax: 415/565-3012
www.wested.org

All Areas — For educators and community members, publications, planning guides, videos, on-line information, and software on learning, instruction, and school improvement. For policymakers, research-based information and analysis

Statewide Education Groups

These organizations represent the views of their respective constituents, often advocate for those views in Sacramento, sponsor training for their members, and offer a variety of publications, some of which are of general interest.

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)

1225 8th Street, Suite 220
Sacramento, CA 95814
916/441-1570
fax: 916/441-3426

Association of California School Administrators (ACSA)

1121 L Street, Suite 904
Sacramento, CA 95814
916/444-3216
fax: 916/444-3245
www.acsa.org

California Federation of Teachers (CFT)

1 Kaiser Plaza, Suite 1440
Oakland, CA 94612
510/832-8812
fax: 510/832-5044
www.cft.org

California School Boards Association (CSBA)

3100 Beacon Boulevard
P.O. Box 1660
West Sacramento, CA 95691
916/371-4691
fax: 916/371-3407
www.csba.org

California School Employees Association (CSEA)

2045 Lundy Avenue
P.O. Box 640
San Jose, CA 95106-9986
408/263-8000
fax: 408/954-0948
www.csea.com

California State PTA

930 Georgia Street
P.O. Box 15015
Los Angeles, CA 90015
213/620-1100
fax: 213/620-1411
www.capta.org

California Teachers Association (CTA)

P.O. Box 921
Burlingame, CA 94011-0921
650/697-1406
fax: 650/692-3267
www.cta.org

Statewide Business and Community-based Organizations

These independent organizations have a long-standing commitment to the value of public education and an interest in school improvement issues. Most have local branches or units, as well as a statewide umbrella organization, that may take action on specific education issues. Some also have relevant publications available.

American Association of University Women (AAUW)

909 12th Street, Suite 114
Sacramento, CA 95814
916/448-7795
fax: 916/448-1729
www.ca-aauw.org

A membership organization of college graduates that promotes education and equity for women and girls and has local branches throughout California. Publishes research, policy, and action guides on gender bias in education.

California Consortium of Education Foundations

P.O. Box 9290
Stanford, CA 94309
415/324-1653
fax: 415/326-7751
e-mail: s.sweeney@forsythe.stanford.edu

Provides training and support services to education foundations throughout California, including guidelines for starting a foundation.

League of Women Voters of California (LWV)

926 J Street, Suite 515
Sacramento, CA 95814
916/442-7215
fax: 916/442-7362
www.ca.lwv.org

At both the state level, and through local leagues, promotes the informed and active participation of citizens in government through advocacy and education. Publications available on many issues, including pros and cons of ballot measures.

California Business Roundtable

P.O. Box 7137
San Francisco, CA 94120-7137
800/222-0213
fax: 415/772-0994
www.cbrt.org

An association of chief executive officers representing diverse businesses throughout California. Has publications available on education policies and issues, particularly as they relate to the business climate in California.

California State Chamber of Commerce

1201 K Street, 12th Floor
P.O. Box 1736
Sacramento, CA 94812-1736
916/444-6670
fax: 916/444-6685

Can provide contact information for local chambers of commerce, many of which sponsor Principal For A Day programs and otherwise work to support and strengthen local schools. Local members determine own areas of interest and activity.

Pacific Institute for Community Organization (PICO)

7200 Bancroft Avenue
2 Eastmont Mall
Oakland, CA 94605
510/639-1444
fax: 510/632-1225

The PICO California Project, which has member organizations in 12 communities in the state, provides leadership training and technical assistance as part of a congregation-based, multi-denominational and multi-ethnic community-organizing network.

AFTERWORD

This School Involvement Project began when subscribers to EdSource's annual Information Service expressed interest in parent/community involvement guides. EdSource readers — many of them school district officials and community activists — told us they wanted these new communication tools to help explain California's complex school reform and policy issues.

From our own experiences in local school decision making, we saw two overriding challenges. Those who come to the table to discuss school improvement often don't share the same base of information about school issues, and they sometimes don't easily understand or trust each other. The resulting "failure to communicate" can waylay the best-intentioned attempts to strengthen schools.

We believed that EdSource was in a unique position to develop school involvement publications that could provide a shared base of information in a way that was clear, accurate, and impartial. Our 20-year history of explaining education data and policy — combined with the personal school volunteer experience of our staff — seemed an excellent fit for designing publications to bridge the information gap between local school improvement efforts and the statewide policy context in California.

It was easier said than done. In the two-year process of going from a basic concept to this finished product, we confronted many challenges. We grappled with the task of organizing the incredibly complicated and interwoven areas of school improvement into subject areas that were at once comprehensive and comprehensible. We spent countless hours talking to educators, policymakers, and others from our list of statewide reviewers who care deeply about public schools, getting their sometimes differing perspectives on what is most important. We struggled to get the information right during a time of rapid change for California schools.

We learned a lot — and not just about the subject matter. We found that many people agree on what the main issues are and on the basic parameters for what schools must do to prepare California's young people for the 21st century. As they say, the devil — and the disagreement — is more in the details. In our 15 visits to school and community organizations, we also discovered a real thirst for clear, accurate, trustworthy information about complicated issues. School and community leaders want to encourage open, constructive discussions that can lead to real change and help strengthen schools. We discovered that all of these Californians share a commitment to the institution of public education and to the children of our state.

Although the two of us shared the lead in strategizing and designing the overall project and this Handbook, Mary shouldered the responsibility for writing and incorporating review comments. The two of us also were responsible for final editorial content. Any mistakes are ours.

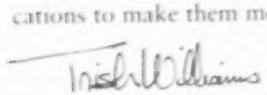
That said, we would like to acknowledge and thank those who gave generously of their time, encouragement, and expertise to help us develop and launch the School Involvement Project.

Early on, Adam Kernan-Schloss of KSA Group helped us search for models of similar efforts from other states. We found few but we gained a broader perspective on ways that education reform was being addressed. Along the way since, Adam's feedback has helped us shape our thinking, articulate our goals, maintain our focus, and improve the publications themselves. He and his staff — especially Sylvia Soholt, Joanne Olson, Heng Hia, and Kathy Ames — also provided the mix of communication strategies and graphic skills needed to create this new style of EdSource publication.

Nearly 20 statewide policy and education organizations and individuals (listed on the next page) helped us assure that our approach was impartial and accurate. Their support, commitment, and knowledge helped guide us from the earliest outlines to the final draft of this Handbook and the other introductory publications in the project. Their unwavering confidence was only equaled by that of the EdSource Board of Directors. In particular, we'd like to thank our board members Jere Jacobs, Gerry Hayward, and Sherry Loofbourrow, and CTA Research Director Dick Odgers for their extraordinary help with research and their careful review at every step along the way. A special thanks also to those individuals who helped organize and/or participated in our field review meetings throughout the state.

As with all EdSource work, the School Involvement Project represented a team effort. Barbara Miller and Penny Howell contributed their support in terms of research and review. Jan Carey and Susan Austin were instrumental in coordinating the extensive review processes, including nearly two months of field reviews. Katie Ho, then a Stanford graduate research intern, played a critical role in pulling together the many references cited in the Handbook. And every other EdSource staff member deserves thanks for their patience, support, and willingness to keep our program running at the times when this project seemed to overwhelm our other activities.

We hope this Handbook — and the other publications that will make up the EdSource School Involvement Project — provide useful and enlightening information to those in California who are stakeholders in the quality of our public schools. We invite your comments, your critique, and your suggestions for how we can improve these publications to make them more effective tools.



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California American Association of University Women (CA AAUW)

California Consortium of Education Foundations (CCEF)

California Department of Education (CDE)

California Federation of Teachers (CFT)

California School Boards Association (CSBA)

California State Parent Teacher Association (CA PTA)

California School Employees Association (CSEA)

California Teachers Association (CTA)

League of Women Voters of California (LWV CA)

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Yvonne W. Larsen, State Board of Education

FIELD REVIEWERS

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Association of California School Administrators

California Consortium of Education Foundations — Northern California and San Diego

California School Boards Association

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California Teachers Association

Campbell Union Elementary School District

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Mountain View School District, Parent Leadership Team and Slater School Site Council

Oakland Unified School District

Pacific Institute for Community Organizations (PICO) — People Acting in Community Together (PACT)

Parlier Unified School District

Saddleback Valley Unified School District

Walnut Valley Unified School District

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PHOTO CREDITS

Thank you to the following California school districts for sharing photographs of their students.

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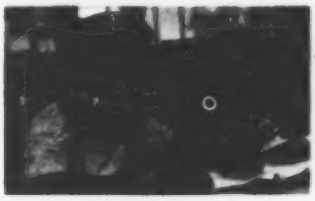

Elk Grove Unified School District

Empire Union School District

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Bakersfield School District

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